Laura Gibbs

Aesop's Fables

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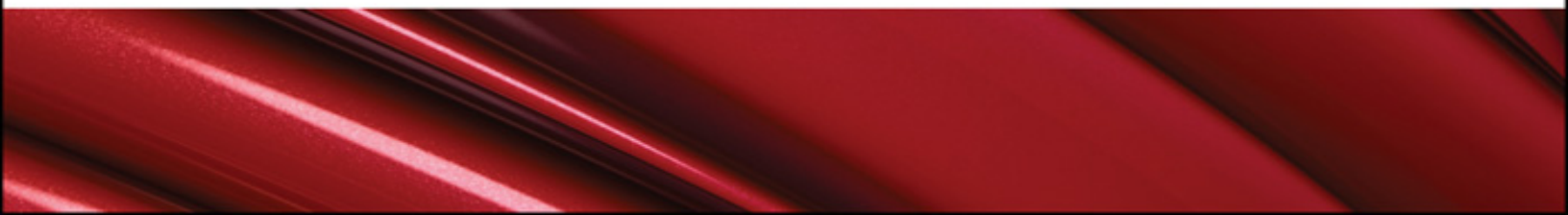

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OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

Aesop's Fables

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
LAURA GIBBS

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AESOP'S FABLES

AESOP was a legendary storyteller of ancient Greece and Rome and 'Aesop's fables' have become one of the most enduring traditions of European culture. There are Aesop's fables scattered throughout Greek and Roman literature, along with extensive collections of the fables compiled in both Latin and Greek. As Aesop's fables circulated throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, so did legends about Aesop himself, who was supposed to have been a notoriously ugly and tongue-tied slave who miraculously received the power of speech with which he won his freedom, only to be treacherously executed by the citizens of Delphi. The historical authenticity of these legends is dubious, but the popularity of Aesop's fables is undeniable. Long after Greece and Rome were in ruins, the fables continued to be copied in both the Latin West and the Greek East until they were reunited once again in the modern printed editions of Aesop first published in the fifteenth century. This English translation of Aesop's fables continues that long history, providing a newly assembled collection that represents all the fables attested in the ancient Greek and Latin traditions, arranged for the first time according to the fables' contents and themes.

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PREFACE

There have been many excellent English translations of Aesop's fables over the centuries, beginning with Caxton's remarkable first edition of the fables in 1484. His lively English translation still conveys a powerful sense of the breadth of the Aesopic tradition, drawing as it does on all the Greek and Latin sources that were known in western Europe at that time. More recent English translations, however, have failed to be as comprehensive as Caxton's great edition of over 500 years ago. On the one hand, there are modern English translations which provide complete versions of a single author or source (a translation of the anonymous Greek fables, for example, or the complete poems of Phaedrus), but by themselves these translations cannot convey a complete picture of the larger tradition. Then there are the English translations which provide only a sampling of fables from the various ancient sources, preferring the most familiar items while omitting the many weird or obscure (and even obscene) stories which were an integral part of the Aesopic tradition. In this new translation for Oxford World's Classics, the ancient Greek and Latin collections are fully represented and arranged for the first time in an order that reflects the fables' dominant preoccupations and themes. Notes are provided for variant versions and comprehensive indexes link each fable to its original source.

In preparing these translations, I have relied greatly on the generosity of Professor Donald Russell, who has provided invaluable comments and suggestions at every stage of this project. Judith Luna has been an ideal editor, and I appreciate her willingness to include Aesop, an admittedly unusual author, in the Oxford World's Classics series. This book has benefited from the ongoing assistance of two outstanding students at the University of Oklahoma, Randy Hoyt and Rebecca Belanus. I also owe very special thanks to Naomi Teplow and all the members of the Excelsior Avenue Poetry Club in Oakland California: I hope that this book can convey to its readers the same joy of discovery that the members of the Poetry Club have shared together over the years.

INTRODUCTION

Aesop and his Fables
Aesop in the Ancient World

The Greek historian Herodotus, writing in the fifth century BCE, considered Aesop to be a historical figure who lived on the island of Samos in the Aegean Sea, near the coast of modern Turkey. According to Herodotus, Aesop originally came from Thrace (modern Balkans), while other ancient sources maintained that he came from Phrygia (modern Turkey or Armenia). The *Life of Aesop*, an ancient Greek novel of uncertain provenance (perhaps dating to the first century CE, but almost certainly relying on earlier prototypes), provides us with an elaborate and extremely humorous account of Aesop's adventures both as a slave and later as a freedman. In its opening lines, we learn about the many disadvantages that Aesop had to overcome:

Aesop, our great benefactor, the storyteller, chanced to be a slave, and by birth he was a Phrygian from Phrygia. He was extremely ugly to look at, filthy, with a big fat belly and a big fat head, snub-nosed, misshapen, dark-skinned, dwarfish, flat-footed, bandy-legged, short-armed, squint-eyed, and fat-lipped, in short, a freak of nature. What's more, there was something even worse than this physical deformity: Aesop was mute and unable to speak.

The story then tells how the mute Aesop treated a priestess of the goddess Isis with such great kindness that he was rewarded with the gift of speech. As soon as he could talk, Aesop proceeded to denounce the overseer of the slaves for his inordinate cruelty. As a result, Aesop was put up for sale and was eventually purchased by a philosopher from the island of Samos named Xanthus. The bulk of the *Life of Aesop* describes the many occasions on which Aesop was able to outwit his master and humiliate his master's wife. Aesop eventually won his freedom and became an advisor to the king of Babylon. He then helped the king of Babylon to win a battle of wits with the king of Egypt, for which he was handsomely rewarded. By that point, Aesop had become famous throughout all the world, but when he went to the Greek city of Delphi, he insulted and provoked the citizens of Delphi to such a degree that they decided to kill him. Without Aesop's knowledge, the Delphians planted a golden cup from the temple of Apollo in his baggage and then arrested him for theft. Although he pleaded for his life by telling a series of stories, the Delphians finally executed Aesop by hurling him from a cliff. Aesop's unhappy fate might suggest that the fables were not an especially effective genre of persuasive speech, but the history of the fables themselves proves otherwise. Even if the fables in the *Life of Aesop* were not able to rescue Aesop from the Delphians, 'Aesop's fables' are one of the longest-lived and most widely diffused genres of ancient Greek and Roman culture. The tradition flourished for more than a thousand years in Greece and Rome, and then sprang

back to life in the later Middle Ages, enjoying another millennium of popularity lasting from the tenth century until the present day.

As shown by the testimony in Herodotus, the legend of Aesop and his fables was already widespread and well-attested in classical Greece. That is why the comic playwright Aristophanes (late fifth century BCE) could safely assume that everyone in his audience was well acquainted with Aesop and his fables, as we can see in this exchange from *The Birds*, which concludes with the fable of the lark and her crest (Fable 499):

PISTHETAERUS. I feel so badly for all of you, who used to be kings.

CHORUS-LEADER. We were kings? Over whom?

PISTHETAERUS. You were kings of everything in existence, of me, and of this man, and even of Zeus himself. You are older than Cronus and the Titans; you were born even before Gaia, the Earth herself.

CHORUS-LEADER. Older than the Earth?!

PISTHETAERUS. I swear it by Apollo.

CHORUS-LEADER. By Zeus, I never heard that before!

PISTHETAERUS. That's because you are ignorant and lacking in curiosity, and have failed to go over your Aesop, who says that *the crested lark was the first bird to be created, even before Gaia, the Earth. As a result, when the lark's father became sick and died, there was no earth to bury him in. On the fifth day that his body had been*

lying there, the frustrated lark, not knowing what else to do, buried her father in her own head.

What exactly does Aristophanes mean by someone 'going over' their Aesop? The Greek verb he uses is *pepatekas*, which literally means to 'have walked through' or 'gone over' Aesop. Citing precisely this passage in Aristophanes, the Liddell–Scott dictionary of Greek suggests that the verb should also mean 'to thumb through', or 'to be always thumbing Aesop'. Such a translation, however, misses the mark. To 'thumb through' Aesop implies that there was a text of Aesop to read, like the book you are holding in your hands right now and which you can certainly 'thumb through' at your leisure. In fifth-century Athens, however, there were no books of Aesop to be thumbed through, since the first written collections of Aesop did not yet exist. It is very hard for us as modern readers to appreciate the fact that Aesop could still be an authority whom you had to consult, even if he were not an author of books to be kept on the shelf. To 'go over' or 'run through' Aesop meant to bring to mind all the many occasions on which you had heard the stories of Aesop told at public assemblies, at dinner parties, and in private conversation. Aesop's fables and the anecdotes about Aesop's famous exploits were clearly a familiar way of speaking in classical Greece, a body of popular knowledge that was meant to be regularly 'gone over' and brought to mind as needed.

Over time, as writing penetrated more and more deeply into the ancient Greek and then the Roman world, the fables of Aesop

became known as both a written and as an oral tradition. The oldest extant collection of written fables is the work of Phaedrus, a freedman poet of ancient Rome who composed his fables in verse sometime in the early first century CE. Not long afterwards, an otherwise unknown poet named Babrius set about composing fables in Greek verse. By writing their fables in verse, both Phaedrus and Babrius openly declared their literary aspirations and paved the way for later experiments in versifying the fables, such as the medieval fables of the poetess Marie de France or her later compatriot Jean de La Fontaine, whose verse fables are one of the masterpieces of French literature. In addition to attracting the interest of the poets, Aesopic fables were also put into collections that were used for teaching purposes by the grammarians and rhetoricians (the fables of Aphthonius, dating to the fourth century CE, belong in this category). Yet while some of the fables were recorded in the handbooks of the grammarians and rhetoricians, Aesop's fables were not considered 'children's literature' in the ancient world. In fact, this notion of a children's Aesop begins only with early modern collections of fables such as Roger L'Estrange's English translation of 1692, which aimed to '*initiate the Children into some sort of Sense and Understanding of their Duty*'. The Aesop's fables of ancient Greece and Rome were told by and for adults, not children. This does not mean, however, that the ancient fables did not serve a didactic purpose. Quite the opposite, in fact: the didactic morals of the fables are one of the most characteristic elements of the genre.

The Moral of the Story

While there is no hard and fast definition of an Aesopic fable, it is the moral of the story that most clearly distinguishes the fables from other kinds of humorous anecdotes or jokes: jokes have punch-lines but fables have morals. Typically, the moral of the story is expressed by one of the characters in the story's very last words, the same position occupied by the punch-line of a joke. Unlike a punch-line, however, a moral conveys a message or lesson. The character who pronounces the moral verbally corrects a mistaken judgement, which might be his own mistaken judgement or that of another character in the story. Consider, for example, the story of the wild ass, or onager, and the domesticated donkey (Fable 4):

An onager saw a donkey standing in the sunshine. The onager approached the donkey and congratulated him on his good physical condition and excellent diet. Later on, the onager saw that same donkey bearing a load on his back and being harried by a driver who was beating the donkey from behind with a club. The onager then declared, 'Well, I am certainly not going to admire your good fortune any longer, seeing as you pay such a high price for your prosperity!'

In this case, the story is based on a single character: the onager. The story opens as the onager makes a mistaken judgement: he thinks that the fat donkey standing in the sunshine is leading an enviable life. Later on, when the onager sees the hard labour and abuse that

afflict the donkey, he realizes that he was mistaken and he voices his new understanding in the fable's final words. Although the onager nominally directs his words at the donkey ('I am certainly not going to admire *your* good fortune any longer'), the fable is oriented around a single character whose conscious thoughts are revealed in the fable and expressed in speech: the wise onager says aloud the lesson he has learned.

Other fables are based on a dramatic interaction between two characters, as in the famous story of the fox and the lion in the cave (Fable 18):

A lion had grown old and weak. He pretended to be sick, which was just a ruse to make the other animals come and pay their respects so that he could eat them all up, one by one. The fox also came to see the lion, but she greeted him from outside the cave. The lion asked the fox why she didn't come in. The fox replied, 'Because I see the tracks of those going in, but none coming out.'

In this story, the lion is trying to lead the fox into making a potentially fatal mistake, walking into his cave as all the other foolish animals did before her. The fox, however, is not fooled, and she explains her wise reasoning in the fable's final words. The dramatic tension between the fox and the lion is resolved in the fox's favour, and the lion has to go hungry. Both of these fables are positive *exempla* in which the onager and the fox provide examples

worthy of imitation: ‘be like the onager: don’t envy the fat donkeys!’ or ‘be like the fox: watch out for those lions!’

In many cases, however, the Aesopic fable provides a negative *exemplum*, an example of some foolish behaviour or mistaken judgement which we would do well to avoid. Greedy creatures, for example, regularly come to a bad end in Aesop, as in the story of the deer and the vine (Fable 80):

A deer who was being pursued by hunters hid under a grapevine. When the hunters had passed by, she turned her head and began to eat the leaves of the vine. One of the hunters came back, and when he saw the deer he hurled his javelin and struck her. As she was dying, the deer groaned to herself, ‘It serves me right, since I injured the vine that saved me!’

A similar fate is in store for creatures who aspire to be something more than they are, or who pretend to be something they are not, as in the story of the wolf and his shadow (Fable 265):

There was once a wolf who went wandering in the desert as the sun was sinking and about to set. Seeing his long shadow, the wolf exclaimed, ‘Should someone as great as myself be afraid of a lion? I’m a hundred feet tall! Clearly I should be the king of all the animals in the world!’ As the wolf was boasting, a mighty lion seized and devoured him. Realizing his mistake after the fact, the wolf exclaimed, ‘My self-conceit has been my undoing!’

In these two fables, the moral is expressed in the dying words of the principal characters, as the deer and the wolf confess the error of their ways with their last breath. Other fables end with castigation rather than confession, as in the famous story of the ant and the cricket (Fable 126):

During the wintertime, an ant was living off the grain that he had stored up for himself during the summer. The cricket came to the ant and asked him to share some of his grain. The ant said to the cricket, 'And what were you doing all summer long, since you weren't gathering grain to eat?' The cricket replied, 'Because I was busy singing I didn't have time for the harvest.' The ant laughed at the cricket's reply, and hid his heaps of grain deeper in the ground. 'Since you sang like a fool in the summer,' said the ant, 'you had better be prepared to dance the winter away!'

This fable depicts lazy, careless people who indulge in foolish pastimes, and therefore lose out.

In this case, the ant both refuses to take pity on the cricket and makes fun of him as well, using the last words of the fable to viciously correct the cricket's mistake. The reader will of course notice that in addition to the last words of the fable spoken by the ant, there is an additional sentence, represented here in italics. In technical terms, this italicized sentence is an *epimythium*, something that comes after the story (Greek *epi-mythos*, 'after-story'). The epimythium is added by the teller of the fable to make sure that the

point is absolutely clear: lazy people will turn out to be losers, just like the cricket. In other fables, there may be instead a *promythium*, a moral that actually comes before the fable (Greek *pro-mythos*, 'before-story'). Unlike the moral which is fully immersed inside the fable (i.e., the witty and vicious words spoken by the ant), the promythium or epimythium draws an explicit link between the world of the fable and the world in which all of us lazy people live. This link between the fable world and our own world is a key element in the fable's didactic function, and a promythium or epimythium explicitly promotes this process of identification.

When fables are performed for an actual audience, the *epimythium* is sometimes needed to decode the meaning of the story so that the audience can understand how to apply it to their lives. Consider, for example, the account of Aesop defending a hated politician on the island of Samos (Fable 29):

Aesop was defending a demagogue at Samos who was on trial for his life, when he told this story: 'A fox was crossing a river but she got swept by the current into a gully. A long time passed and she couldn't get out. Meanwhile, there were ticks swarming all over the fox's body, making her quite miserable. A hedgehog wandered by and happened to see the fox. He took pity on her and asked if he should remove the ticks, but the fox refused. The hedgehog asked the reason why, and the fox replied, "These ticks have taken their fill of me and are barely sucking my blood at this point, but if you take these ticks away, others will come and those hungry new ticks

will drink up all the blood I have left!" And the same is true for you, people of Samos: this man will do you no harm since he is already wealthy, but if you condemn him to death, others will come who do not have any money, and they will rob you blind!'

In this account, Aesop tells a fable about a fox and a hedgehog, and the fox pronounces the moral of the story, correcting the hedgehog's mistaken judgement: the hedgehog thinks it would be a good idea to get rid of those ticks, but the fox knows better. In the epimythium added by Aesop, who is shown here as a fable performer, there is an explicit link between the timeless, fictional world of the fox and the actual trial which is taking placing right now at Samos: the man on trial is a tick swollen fat with blood (wealthy man), but if the people of Samos remove (execute) him, then other ticks will come and drink their blood (rob them blind). This depiction of a fable in performance shows what might be called the fullest form of the Aesopic fable, in which the fox's moral inside the fable and Aesop's moral outside the fable combine to promote the fable's entertaining and educational functions.

When Aesop's fables were later recorded in writing, however, the role of the fable's author began to hold greater and greater sway, so that the moral inside the story (pronounced by one of the story's characters) began to give way to an increasing emphasis on the moral appended by the fable's author in the form of a promythium or epimythium. In fact, what might be called the *endomythium*, the moral inside the story (Greek *endo-mythos*, 'inside-story'), was

sometimes omitted entirely, as can already be seen in the first extant collection of fables, the poems of the Roman freedman Phaedrus. Consider, for example, Phaedrus' version of the story of the fox and the goat at the well (Fable 113):

As soon as someone clever gets into trouble, he tries to find a way out at someone else's expense.

A fox had unwittingly fallen in a well and found herself trapped inside its high walls. Meanwhile, a thirsty goat had made his way to that same place and asked the fox whether the water was fresh and plentiful. The fox set about laying her trap. 'Come down, my friend,' said the fox. 'The water is so good that I cannot get enough of it myself!' The bearded billy-goat lowered himself into the well whereupon that little vixen leaped up onto his lofty horns and came up out of the hole, leaving the goat stuck inside the watery prison.

In his version of the story, Phaedrus provides a promythium in which he introduces in advance what will be the moral action of the fable. Having promised a story about a clever character and a foolish victim, he then tells how the clever fox tricked the foolish goat. But what about the endomythium, in which the goat would admit his foolish mistake or the fox would make fun of him? Phaedrus does not feel a need to supply us with this type of moral inside the story. Throughout his fables, Phaedrus consistently includes either a promythium (as here) or an epimythium, while he

often omits the endomythium, the moral pronounced inside the story.

There are, however, other versions of this fable about the fox and the goat which do include an endomythium, in addition to the promythium or epimythium. Caxton's fifteenth-century English version of the fables follows this tradition, reporting the vicious and witty words with which the fox mocks the goat, adding insult to injury:

And thenne the foxe beganne to lawhe and to scorne hym | and sayd to hym | O mayster goote | yf thow haddest be wel wyse with thy fayre berde | or euer thow haddest entryd in to the welle | thow sholdest fyrst haue taken hede | how thow sholdest haue comen oute of hit ageyne.

Phaedrus and Caxton, separated from one another by more than a millennium of time and an even greater cultural gap, are both telling the 'same' fable, but they do so according to different styles of storytelling.

Sometimes there is more at stake than style, and the contents of the moral become a matter of disputed interpretation. The moral inside the story may provide one lesson, with the moral outside the story reaching an entirely different conclusion. The story of the fox and the eagle provides an example of this kind of discrepancy (Fable 83): An eagle was once caught by a man who immediately clipped his wings and turned him loose in the house with the chickens. The

eagle was utterly dejected and grief-stricken. Another man bought the eagle and restored the eagle's feathers. The eagle then soared on his outspread wings and seized a hare, which he promptly brought back as a gift for the man who had rescued him. A fox saw what the eagle was doing and shouted, 'He's not the one who needs your attention! You should give the hare to the first man, so that if he ever catches you again, he won't deprive you of your wing feathers like the first time.'

The fable shows that we should give appropriate thanks to our benefactors, while avoiding evil-doers.

The endomythium pronounced by the fox is perfectly suited to the fable in which one character corrects the mistake made by another: the naive eagle thinks that he should reward the man who already regards him as a friend, but the clever fox knows better. The fox offers the eagle a quite practical piece of advice, but the point of the fox's speech seems to have been lost on at least some of the later authors who collected and transmitted this fable. The epimythium takes a completely different approach, as if the eagle would do better to avoid the man who clipped his wings and devote himself to his benefactor. The author of this epimythium is thus hoping to make the Aesop's fable into an illustration of gratitude, while the fox is advocating a strategy worthy of Machiavelli. This blatant contradiction between the moral inside the story and the moral outside the story has often aroused the contempt of modern editors

and translators of the fables. Lloyd Daly went so far as to consign all the epimythia to an appendix in the back of his translation of the fables, which was defiantly entitled *Aesop without Morals* (1961). Yet surely this conflict between the endomythia and the epimythia is worthy of our attention, allowing us to glimpse what are in effect two different moral codes confronting one another in a sustained moment of unresolved tension.

Finally, a number of modern editors have also been disconcerted by the quantity of material in the ancient collections which does not seem to teach any kind of moral lesson whatsoever. There are numerous jokes in these ancient collections, as well as aetiological stories and allegories, myths and legends, and even contemporary gossip about the rich and the famous. For each of these related genres, it is easy to see what might have prompted their inclusion together with the fables in a collection. For example, given that the endomythium of a fable is so much like the punch-line of a joke, it only makes sense that other jokes and witticisms would be included in the fable collections. Moreover, Aesop himself was the subject of many jokes and anecdotes, and these naturally made their way into the ancient fable collections. Aesop was also a teller of riddles and an interpreter of enigmas, so these forms of folklore and popular wisdom can likewise be found in the ancient collections. In addition to Aesop, there are other famous figures of popular wisdom who appear in the fables, such as Thales, one of the legendary ‘seven

sages' of ancient Greece, as well as other legendary wise men such as Simonides and Socrates.

Animal Lore and Legend in the Fables

More than the human characters, however, it is the animal characters—the talking animals—who catch our attention in the fables. Modern readers are often surprised, in fact, to discover that Aesop's fables are not strictly limited to animal stories. Yet at the same time that the fables so often involve animal characters, there was no special relationship between the legendary Aesop and the world of animals; Aesop was by no means an ancient Doctor Dolittle who could 'talk to the animals'. Instead, Aesop talked *about* animals (but not exclusively about them), using jokes and stories about talking animals in order to make a sharp critique of human foolishness. We already saw how Aesop used the fable of the fox and the hedgehog when defending a politician on trial at Samos (Fable 29). Likewise, when Aesop saw some people celebrating the wedding of a thief who lived next door, he told a story about some foolish frogs in order to chastise the people's foolish behaviour (Fable 436). Aesop was also famous for his aetiological stories, much like Kipling's 'just-so' stories, explaining how the tortoise got its shell (Fable 508), how the crested lark got its crest (Fable 499), and so on. Given the presence of animals in so many of Aesop's fables, it is therefore not surprising that over time some anecdotes and legends from the natural-history writers were also adopted as

Aesop's fables. There were many strange and fascinating legends about animals in the ancient world—stories about hermaphrodite hyenas, self-castrating beavers, swans who sing their 'swan-song' at the moment of their death, among others—all of which found their way into the fables. Likewise, there are also some animal stereotypes that come into play: the fox is often sly (but not always), the lion is typically brave (but not always), the rabbit is generally a coward, the peacock proud, and so on. Yet precisely because Aesop's fables revel in surprise and paradox, things often turn out other than expected: the lion may be big and brave, but he can become indebted to a mouse; the wolf may be a crafty predator, but he can be outwitted by a goat, and so on. The encounters between the animals are not determined by any kind of rigid formula in Aesop: you can never be sure of what is going to happen when the wolf encounters a sheep, or when the donkey challenges the lion.

The animal characters of Aesop's fables bear a sometimes uncanny resemblance to those in the ancient folktales of India collected both in the Hindu storybook called the *Panchatantra* (which later gave rise to the collection entitled *Kalila wa Dimnah*, a book which served as a source for many of the didactic animal stories in the Islamic mystical poet Rumi) and also in the tales of the Buddha's former births, called *jatakas*. Like Aesop's fables, the stories in the *Panchatantra* and in the *jatakas* are didactic tales that illustrate a specific point or moral, generally with talking animals as their principal characters. Yet unlike the disjointed Aesop's fables,

both the *jatakas* and the *Panchatantra* stories are narrated within the overarching structure of a frame tale: there is an external narrative, the frame, which includes as part of its plot the telling of a story, while the moral of this inner story conveys a message to the characters in the framing narrative. The *jatakas*, for example, consist of two parts: a story of the present, in which the Buddha is often mediating a dispute among the monks of his monastery, and a story of the past, in which the Buddha was incarnated as a person, or animal, or even a plant in a past life. These stories of the past, like Aesop's fables, convey a pointed message meant to educate the audience listening to Buddha's recitation in the world of the present. Similarly, the *Panchatantra* features elaborate framing narratives, as when the animals in the court of the lion king plot and scheme against one another, telling each other stories in order to defend their goals and strategies. In the written tradition of Aesop's fables, however, we very rarely find such elaborate framing narratives. In a few cases, Aesop is depicted as telling a story in order to instruct his contemporaries, as in the story of the frogs told at the thief's wedding or the various moments in the *Life of Aesop* when Aesop tells an illustrative story. For the most part, however, Aesop's fables stand alone: they were not transmitted as stories embedded in framing narratives.

It is only in medieval Europe that a more elaborate narrative form begins to emerge with the medieval 'beast epic' stories of Reynard the fox, inveterate rival of Ysengrimus, the wolf. In the

beast epics, the animals become self-aware individuals, endowed with memory, motivation and—perhaps most importantly—personal names. It is but a slight jump from this tradition to the horse named Boxer in Orwell's *Animal Farm,* the famous pigs named Wilbur or Babe or Porky, not to mention Bugs Bunny, Mickey Mouse, and innumerable other cartoon animals, along with the extraordinary comic-book animals in Spiegelman's *Maus*. The characters in Aesop's fables, on the other hand, are still basically generic representatives of their species; they have not yet become specific individuals.

Sources of the Fables
Anonymous Collections

Approximately one-third of the fables in this book are taken from the anonymous Greek collections of fables attributed to Aesop, which consist almost entirely of prose versions of the fables. The dating of these anonymous collections is a subject of much scholarly disagreement. It is generally agreed that the first collection was the work of Demetrius of Phalerum (d. 280 BCE), who is supposed to have written a book of fables called *Aisopeia*, 'the things of Aesop'. Except for (perhaps) a single fragment of papyrus, Demetrius' book has disappeared completely and the relationship between this lost text and the later collections of the fables is a subject of considerable study, based largely on conjecture as well as wishful thinking. While it is quite likely that Demetrius did compose this first written collection of Aesopic fables, there is no reason to doubt that he later had many imitators, and the anonymous Aesopic

collections that have survived might have been assembled almost anywhere in the ancient Greek or Roman worlds with or without access to Demetrius' *Aisopeia*. The *Collectio Augustana* (so named because its principal manuscript was at one point housed in Augsburg) is probably the oldest of these collections, dating to the second or third century CE (although some scholars date it later, to the fourth or fifth century). The *Augustana* contains approximately 230 fables arranged in alphabetical order based on the first word of each fable. It gave rise to two other major collections, the so-called *Collectio Vindobonesis* (which takes its name from a manuscript housed in Vienna) and the *Collectio Accursiana* (named after the editor of the first printed edition, Bonus Accursius, who published this collection of Greek fables in the late fifteenth century). These various collections continued to grow over time, as the authors of the different manuscript traditions incorporated the Aesopic fables that they heard or read elsewhere, until eventually there were over 350 fables circulating in the anonymous Greek collections, copied and recopied over the centuries by Byzantine scholars and scribes.

Phaedrus

The Roman poet Phaedrus was a freedman of the emperor Augustus who certainly lived during the reign of the emperor Tiberius and perhaps as late as the reign of Nero. This allows us to date his fables to the early first century CE, making the poems of Phaedrus the earliest extant collection of fables. There are approximately 120

verse fables of Phaedrus that have survived (written in a Latin metre called *iambic senarii*), of which slightly over 100 are translated in this book. Aside from the historical period in which he lived and his status as a freedman (former slave), very little is known about Phaedrus. Despite his great ambitions, about which he is very explicit in his poems, he seems to have made little or no impression on later generations of Roman writers. His poems are addressed to patrons named Eutychus and Particulo, but these persons are also otherwise unknown. Poems from five different books of fables by Phaedrus have been preserved in a ninth-century manuscript, the so-called *Codex Pithoeanus*, but not all of the books are complete. There are medieval prose paraphrases of Phaedrus that reflect a more complete collection of poems than what has come down to us directly (see below), and there is also a separate collection of fables copied from a manuscript of Phaedrus discovered by the humanist scholar Niccolo Perotti in the fifteenth century. This manuscript has since been lost, but Perotti's copy was preserved and is commonly referred to as 'Perotti's Appendix'. The fables transmitted by Perotti do not, however, contain the *promythia* and *epimythia* (regular features of Phaedrus' fables) and instead Perotti substituted his own editorial morals in prose, which are included here in the notes to the fables. It is not known what sources Phaedrus used to craft his poems. Presumably some of these were Greek, although there are many fables in his collection which are not found in any extant Greek source.

One of the most curious features of Phaedrus' fables is his attempt to supply fables about exploitation and injustice with a more pious conclusion than would otherwise be expected from the Aesopic tradition. For example, in the gruesome story of the fox's murderous vengeance against the eagle for having killed her cubs, Phaedrus supplies an ending in which both the cubs and the eagle's chicks live happily ever after (Fable 154). This is not to say that Phaedrus does not share the vicious sense of humour that is characteristic of the Aesopic fable tradition. His story of the dog who starves to death while guarding a treasure (Fable 405, not attested in any extant Greek source) is Aesopic storytelling of the highest order, in which the dog not only suffers a fatal punishment, but is also insulted by the vulture after his death. Another notable feature of Phaedrus' fables is the large number of stories which he tells about Aesop himself: he frequently appears both as a storyteller (see Fable 436, when he tells the story of the frogs and the sun to the foolish people celebrating the thief's wedding) and as the story's protagonist (see Fable 537, when Aesop challenges a man with the riddle of the bow).

Babrius

While we know little about the Latin poet Phaedrus, we know even less about Babrius, whose identity will probably always remain in doubt. Current scholarly opinion casts him as a Hellenised Roman who lived and worked in Cilicia (modern Turkey or Armenia) during the reign of a certain 'King Alexander' in the late first

century CE (see Fable 502). Babrius wrote his fables in an unusual style of Greek verse (*choliambics*) and there are slightly more than 140 fables extant, of which just short of 100 are included in this book. The most important manuscript of Babrius is the so-called *Athoan Codex* from Mt. Athos in Greece, which dates from the tenth century and contains just over 120 fables arranged alphabetically. Given that the manuscript breaks off abruptly at the letter 'O', scholars speculate that Babrius originally composed something like 200 fables. As in the case of Phaedrus, it is not clear what sources Babrius used for his fables. The two poets tell many of the same fables, but there are also fables in Babrius and in Phaedrus that are not extant in any other ancient source. Of all the fable collections preserved from antiquity, Babrius is probably the most typically Aesopic and the most consistently humorous. Babrius' fables tend to be brief and sometimes even terse to the point of obscurity, but he also wrote some longer and more intricate fables, including the extraordinary fable of the lion, the fox, and the deer (Fable 600), which is over 100 lines in length. There is considerable debate over the *epimythia* appended to the fables of Babrius. Many scholars consider these to be the work of later editors of the text and not of Babrius himself. In this book, the disputed *epimythia* can be found in the notes to the fables.

Aphthonius

Aphthonius was a scholar and teacher of the fourth century CE associated with the school of Libanius. The fables of Aphthonius are

forty in number, of which twenty-five are included in this book. In general, Aphthonius' fables are attested in other ancient sources, although there are a few fables which are otherwise unknown. As a rule, his fables are quite brief and, with few exceptions, he includes both a promythium and an epimythium for every fable. Given this abundance of editorial moralizing, it is not surprising that in the majority of Aphthonius' fables there is no endomythium, those witty last words spoken by one of the characters inside the fable itself. In his rhetorical treatise, the *Progymnasmata* (conveniently reprinted as van Dijk G54), Aphthonius states that Aesop was the best of all the *writers* of fables. Clearly, for Aphthonius, Aesop is no longer a storyteller so much as he is a writer and scholar like Aphthonius himself.

Avianus

There are just over forty fables ascribed to Avianus (written in Latin elegiac couplets), of which fifteen are included in this book. Although there are still some arguments as to Avianus' historical identity, it seems reasonable to identify him with the 'Avienus' who is described as a participant in the *Saturnalia* of Macrobius, in the early fifth century CE. Avianus dedicates his fables to a certain 'Theodosius', who may be this same Macrobius (i.e. Ambrosius Macrobius Theodosius). Although Avianus mentions both Phaedrus and Babrius in the introduction to his poems, it is clearly Babrius who is his model (apparently via a Greek prose version later rendered in Latin prose which Avianus then put into verse).

However, Avianus tends to write longer, more intricate fables, without the brevity and wit that is so characteristic of Babrius. The Latin poems of Avianus remained quite popular throughout the Middle Ages and spawned many imitators.

Syntipas

The fables attributed to ‘Syntipas’ are actually the work of Michael Andreopulus, a Greek scholar of the eleventh century who translated a collection of Syriac fables into Greek. Those Syriac fables, in turn, had originally been translated from Greek either in late antiquity or even well into the Middle Ages. There are slightly over sixty fables in this collection, most of which are included in this book. The significance of the Syntipas fables becomes clear when we realize that fifteen, approximately one-quarter of the collection, are not attested elsewhere in the Aesopic corpus. Thanks to their preservation in Syriac, the fables of Syntipas escaped extinction, while we can only speculate about the hundreds or even thousands of other Greek fables that vanished along with their manuscripts (not to mention all the fables that were never even recorded in written form). Although the fables of Syntipas reach us by a roundabout path (from Greek to Syriac and back into Greek again), they remain quite lively. Most importantly, the fables of Syntipas regularly include an endomythium, the witty moral inside the story, in addition to the moralizing epimythium that concludes the tale.

Other Greek and Latin Sources

Aesop's fables are widely reported in various Greek and Latin authors, and in some cases the fables translated in this book have been taken directly from these literary sources. Not infrequently a fable first reported in a literary source later makes its way into one of the Aesopic collections, sometimes verbatim. In such cases, preference has been given to the version reported in the collections, although the notes provide references to the literary sources as well.

Poetry and Prose

While Phaedrus and Babrius appear to have been the first authors to have considered the Aesopic fable to be a literary genre, there are Aesopic fables attested in Greek and Roman literature reaching as far back as the archaic Greek poets Hesiod and Archilochus. There are also fables in the fragments that survive of the archaic Roman poet Ennius. The *Greek Anthology* (a collection of poetry which includes Greek poets of all periods) contains a number of fables. The most significant literary source for the fables is the Greek comic playwright Aristophanes. In Latin, the most important source is Horace, who frequently recounts or alludes to Aesopic fables in his poems. In prose, there are Greek fables found in the satirist Lucian and the novelist Achilles Tatius, as well as numerous fables included in the novel known as the *Life of Aesop* (discussed above).

Oratory and Rhetoric

As a form of public discourse, Aesop's fables were used by the orators of Greece and Rome and were a subject of rhetorical study. There are fables included here which were reportedly used by the classical Greek orators Demosthenes and Demades, as well as by the orators of later periods such as Maximus of Tyre, Themistius, and Dio Chrysostom. Some fables can also be found in the rhetorical treatises of classical authors such as Aristotle and later authors such as Hermogenes and Diogenian, among others.

Historiography

Accounts of Aesopic fables can be found in the historical writings of the Greek historians Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, and Plutarch and also in the Roman historian Livy. These historians recount specific fables that were reportedly used in speeches by historical figures, providing further evidence for the orators' performance of the fables. For example, the famous speech by Menenius Agrippa to the plebeians of Rome in 494 BCE (Fable 66) is reported in Livy's history of Rome and is also found in Plutarch's *Life of Coriolanus*.

Symposiastic Writing

Another important source for Aesopic fables is the 'symposiastic' or 'table talk' literature of such writers as Xenophon, Plutarch, and Athenaeus in Greek, and Aulus Gellius in Latin. Unlike the fables used by the orators and politicians, the speakers at a symposium provide a glimpse into a somewhat more private mode of 'going over' the fables. Plutarch's *Banquet of the Seven Sages* is a

symposiastic composition in which Aesop himself appears as a character.

The Medieval Latin Fables

During the Middle Ages, the Aesopic tradition remained popular in the Greek East (and there are several fables included in this book that come from Byzantine sources, such as the ninth-century Aesopic poetry of Ignatius Diaconus), but it was in the Latin West that the fables truly thrived, thanks largely to the prose paraphrases of the Roman poet Phaedrus. As mentioned earlier, only a portion of Phaedrus' actual poems have reached us intact, but there are prose paraphrases made of the missing poems which are preserved in the medieval tradition under the name of 'Romulus'. The manuscripts of the Romulus tradition date to the tenth century and later, although it is unclear exactly how and when the first versions of the Romulus collection were assembled. Do all the materials in the early Romulus collections derive from Phaedrus? By what intermediary stages did the poems of Phaedrus reach the form that we find in these later prose paraphrases? These are subjects of much debate among scholars. In any case, there are a number of poems in the Romulus manuscripts which are almost certainly based on poems of Phaedrus, so much so that some scholars have attempted to reconstruct the lost poems on this basis.

Over time, however, new fables were clearly added to the Romulus collections, and as a result the collections vary

considerably in contents and style. The new additions include both fables that were taken from other collections as well as some added by the medieval authors who both retold familiar fables in markedly new variations and recorded the oral stories that were circulating in their own communities. Later versions of the Romulus collections were also versified, putting the prose back into poetry (although using medieval poetic forms that are quite different from Phaedrus' own *iambic senarii*). Slightly fewer than twenty fables from the Romulus collections are included in this book, and each reference indicates the particular version of Romulus which is being translated. When the reference 'Romulus' appears by itself, it refers simply to the so-called *Romulus vulgaris*, or common edition. The *Romulus ad Rufum* refers to a collection dedicated to an otherwise unknown 'Rufus'. There are also a few fables taken from the Romulus collections which circulated in England (the *Romulus Anglicus* and the more extensive *Romulus Anglicus cunctis*) as well as the *Romulus Monacensis*, or 'Munich Romulus'.

Ademar of Chabannes

Ademar of Chabannes was a monk and scholar who is best known as the author of the *Chronicon*, a history of France covering the years 399 up to 1030. He was also the author of sermons and liturgical works as well as devotional Christian poetry. Fortunately for us, he also produced a collection of sixty-seven Aesopic fables, about half of which are included in this book. Ademar's work has a special place in the medieval Latin tradition because the fables he included

are rather different from the usual Romulus corpus. Of the sixty-seven fables, there are thirty which follow the Romulus paraphrase of Phaedrus, but there are fourteen fables based on extant poems of Phaedrus that are not found elsewhere in the Romulus collections (along with an additional five fables which seem to be a combination of the Romulus version with the original of Phaedrus, or with a markedly different paraphrase of Phaedrus). Clearly, Ademar had at his disposal either the original poems of Phaedrus or, at a minimum, some paraphrase of Phaedrus that was both more complete than the paraphrase represented by the Romulus collections and, for that matter, more complete than the surviving poems of Phaedrus which are known to us. This makes it highly tempting to suppose that at least some of the other eighteen fables in Ademar which are not attested in any other source could, in fact, represent additional fables of Phaedrus that we can recover from the medieval tradition. However, it is also entirely possible that these fables are Ademar's rendering of stories that he heard or read elsewhere. As the anonymous Greek collections show, the fable collections were extremely fluid, growing and expanding to accommodate new material. Yet, given Ademar's probable access to some more extensive version of Phaedrus, it is at least possible that some of his 'original' fables date back almost exactly a thousand years, to the reign of the first Roman emperors.

Odo of Cheriton

In addition to the anonymous Romulus collections and the fables of Ademar, there is another extremely important source for the medieval Latin Aesop: the parables of Odo of Cheriton, a notable scholar and cleric of the thirteenth century. Of the 120 parables included in this collection, approximately ninety can be considered Aesopic fables of a sort, although the majority of Odo's stories are not attested in earlier fable collections. There are eighteen of Odo's fables included in this book, some of which are variations on traditional fables and some of which are attested only in Odo. Unlike Ademar and the other authors of the medieval Romulus tradition, Odo situates his fables in a strongly Christian context, arming his stories with allegorical sermons which occasionally go on longer than the stories themselves. The sermons have not been included here, although the following can serve as a typical example of Odo's interpretive style (Fable 328):

A fable against people who boast that they have something they do not.

There was a crow who saw that she was ugly and black, so she complained to the eagle. The eagle told her to borrow some feathers from her fellow birds. The crow did as the eagle suggested, taking feathers from the tail of the peacock, from the wings of the dove, and so on and so forth, appropriating the other birds' feathers. When the crow decided that she was sufficiently well dressed, she began to laugh at the other birds and yell at them. The other birds then went and complained to the eagle about the boastful crow. The eagle replied, 'Let every bird take back her feathers, and thus

humiliate the crow.' This is what they did, and so the crow was left ugly and naked.

In the same way man, that miserable creature, boasts of his adornment. But let the sheep take back her wool, and the earth its clay, and the cattle and the goats their hides, and the porcupines and the rabbits their pelts, and that miserable man will be left naked and ugly, and this indeed is how he will be on the day of his death, when he will be unable to carry away with him any of his earthly goods.

This fable can also be used against wealthy men who boast of the extent of their riches: the Lord will take everything away in time and thus the rich are humiliated.

Odo's approach to the fables has clearly been influenced by the Christian allegorical and exegetical traditions of the Middle Ages. Far more than the traditional moralizers of the fables, Odo seizes on specific words and images from the text of the story in order to craft his sermon, as when he carefully echoes the 'crow left ugly and naked' with the 'man left naked and ugly'. Yet at the same time that Odo's commentaries exceed the bounds of the Aesopic *epimythium*, he is nevertheless a master storyteller (see, for example, Fable 105, the wonderful story of the cat and the stork, a variation on the traditional story of the fox and the crow). In addition, Odo appears to be the first collector of fables who tries to arrange at least some of his fables in thematic groups. The opening fables of his collection, for example, are all concerned with the process of choosing a ruler:

Odo begins with the biblical fable of the trees electing a king (Fable 26), followed by fables of animals electing a king (ants, frogs, birds), and finally a human story of monks choosing their abbot (Fable 28). It is also worth noting that Odo includes a number of natural-history anecdotes in his parables, such as the story of the phoenix who is born out of the fire and the pelican who revives his chicks by letting them drink his blood. These are again markedly Christian allegories (often derived from the *Physiologus* or the later bestiary tradition), but their presence in a book of fables parallels the inclusion of natural-history anecdotes in the ancient Greek and Roman collections.

Modern Editions

Perry

There are several modern editions of Aesopic fables referred to in these pages. Most important is the monumental work published by Ben Perry in 1952, which is entitled *Aesopica*. This is the only modern edition that attempts to cover both the Greek and Latin traditions, and Perry's numeration of the fables is the standard which is followed here. The book is a veritable treasure trove but at the same time it is intended exclusively for specialists. Aside from an eleven-page introduction in English, the remaining 750 pages consist entirely of Greek and Latin. Perry's discussion of the fables is written entirely in Latin; even the instructions for using the indexes in the back of the book are written in Latin. In 1965 Perry published a translation of the poems of Babrius and Phaedrus for the Loeb

Classical Library, with an appendix containing hundreds of additional fables translated into English along with extensive English indexes. Readers who want to learn more about the Aesopic tradition but who do not know Greek and Latin will want to consult the appendix to Perry's Loeb edition rather than trying to use the indexes of his *Aesopica*.

Chambry

The anonymous Greek fables were carefully collated and edited by the French scholar Émile Chambry, who first published his results in a two-volume edition for the Belles Lettres series in 1925–6, which was then reduced to a single volume for the second edition in 1927 (it is this second edition which was recently translated by Robert and Olivia Temple under the misleading title *Aesop: The Complete Fables*). As Chambry explains in the opening words of his introduction to the first edition, *numerosi sunt Aesopi codices*, 'many are the manuscripts of Aesop'. To be precise, Chambry lists ninety-four manuscripts held in public libraries and explains that he spent seven years analysing their contents, finally printing an edition of the fables containing over 880 individual fables arranged according to slightly over 350 fable types (some fables being represented by one or more variant versions). The fables were organized according to the traditional alphabetizing method based on the first word of the first fable listed for each type. Unfortunately, when Chambry sometimes selected different fables to appear in the second edition,

it caused a disruption of the alphabetical system, so that the numeration of the first and second editions is slightly out of kilter.

Hervieux

For the medieval Latin fables, the standard reference is still Leopold Hervieux's *Les Fabulistes latins* (1893–9). The first volume contains an edition of the poems of Phaedrus which has largely been superseded by more recent editions, but the second volume, which contains the medieval paraphrases of Phaedrus, is for the most part still the standard edition, which is also true for Hervieux's edition of Odo's fables, found in volume four.

van Dijk

The notes to the fables contain several references to recent work by Gert-Jan van Dijk, who has undertaken the monumental task of reviewing the literary evidence for the Aesopic fables in Greece and Rome. His *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi* (1997) contains important texts in Greek and Latin (especially excerpts from the ancient grammarians), together with commentary and analysis of the fables. Although it is not an edition in the strict sense of the word, van Dijk has identified at least one important fable which was omitted from Perry's inventory (Fable 239), and he provides some very useful discussions about the interpretive context for the relatively few fables which are attested in ancient literary sources.

NOTE ON THE TEXT AND TRANSLATION

Contents

I have preferred to translate fables from sources that have not been translated into English before (especially the Greek fables of Aphthonius and Syntipas, along with the later Latin fables) and I have also made use of the variants published in Chambry's first edition of the anonymous Greek fables, translating alternate versions which have not previously appeared in English (these are marked with an asterisk in the text). Thus, slightly more than a quarter of the fables included here have not previously appeared in English translation: these are not new fables *per se*, but they are new versions of the fables in English. For the remainder of the fables, preference was given to material appearing in the ancient collections and in *The Life of Aesop*, although fables appearing in miscellaneous ancient authors have been included if that is the fable's only source. In a few cases I have provided two different versions of the same fable in order to highlight the kind of change and variation that is possible within the fable tradition. Finally, I have not excluded any of the items from the extant collections of fables (anonymous Greek fables, Phaedrus, Babrius, Aphthonius, Avianus, and Syntipas), even though there are certainly materials in these collections that are more like jokes or legends than traditional Aesopic fables. Part I of this book is dedicated to fables in the more

traditional sense, while these arguably extraneous materials can be found in Part II.

Numeration

It has been traditional to arrange the fables in alphabetical order based on the initial letter of the fable's first word or its title. This is the arrangement followed in the anonymous Greek fables and in the poems of Babrius, and it is also the arrangement adopted by modern scholars of the fables such as Chambry, Perry, and Rodríguez Adrados. Yet such an alphabetical arrangement is hardly helpful for the casual reader, especially as it is now so easy to supply a separate index to the fables (which, after all, was the purpose of the ancient effort to alphabetize). An alternative to alphabetizing is to group the fables by source and chronologically, which is actually how the numeration systems of Perry and Rodríguez Adrados are organized: they first separate all the Greek fables from the Latin fables (putting the Greek fables first, even when they come later than the early Latin fables), and they then assign some rough chronological and source divisions within those larger groups, then arranging the fables alphabetically within those divisions. This cumbersome process offers no benefits whatsoever to anyone who is reading the fables simply for pleasure. Therefore, instead of arranging the fables alphabetically or chronologically, I have followed the lead of Odo of Cheriton and grouped the fables according to their contents, making it possible to follow the patterns of theme and variation that characterize the Aesopic tradition. The resulting numeration is not

meant to be adopted or used for any scholarly purpose; instead, the fables should be referred to by their Perry number, which is the most comprehensive and reliable system currently available. The source for each fable is also indicated, together with its numeration in that particular source. There is an index of Perry numbers in the back of this book, along with an index of original sources (more elaborate cross-indexes, as well as Greek and Latin texts, can be found at the website http://www.aesopica.net).

For readers who are interested in the chronological history of the fables, it is perhaps worth explaining briefly the logic behind Perry's numeration, since it is possible to understand something about each fable's history by examining its Perry number. Fables that are extant in any Greek source whatsoever (ancient or Byzantine) are numbered from 1 to 471 (1–273 for the anonymous Greek collections; 274–378 derive from Babrius; 379–471 come from miscellaneous Greek sources). Perry then turns to the fables of Phaedrus which are not extant in any Greek source, numbering them from 472 to 557. Any Perry number greater than 557 therefore indicates a fable which is extant only in a medieval Latin source (and Perry includes Avianus among the medieval Latin sources).

The Translation

I have translated the verse fables into prose, although the reader will still detect a great deal of stylistic variation: the poems of

Avianus still feel much more intricate and artificial than the simple prose fables of Aphthonius or Syntipas. I have occasionally translated the customary Greek and Latin epithets in a form that will be more comprehensible to modern readers (so where the phrase ‘leader of the Muses’ appears, I have translated ‘Apollo, leader of the Muses’, or sometimes just ‘Apollo’). I have also sometimes glossed the name of a god or historical figure to remind the reader of their particular function: ‘Aphrodite, the goddess of love’, for example, or ‘Mars, the god of war’. When a fable comes from a Greek source, I have used the Greek names of the gods (Zeus, Hera, Athena, *et al.*), and Latin names are used in the Latin fables (Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, *et al.*). The first time a divinity, place-name, or historical figure is mentioned in a fable, there is a note to the fable, and there is also an index of proper names, making it easy to find the first fable in which a particular god or person or place is mentioned.

A very interesting problem is posed by the linguistic gender of the animals in Greek and Latin. Every Greek and Latin noun, including the names of animals, has a fixed linguistic gender which is either masculine or feminine. The Greek raven, *korax*, is always masculine, as is the Latin *corvus*, while the Greek weasel, *gale*, is always feminine, as is the Latin weasel, *mustela*. Yet sometimes the gender may be masculine in Greek and feminine in Latin, or vice versa. So, for example, the Greek frog, *batrachos*, is masculine while the Latin frog, *rana*, is feminine. In English, then, a fable that is

translated from the Greek will refer to the frog as ‘he’ while a fable translated from Latin will refer to the frog as ‘she’. The same thing is also true of the eagle, one of the most common characters in the fables: the Greek eagle, *aetos*, is masculine, while the Latin eagle, *aquila*, is feminine. This may cause some confusion at first, but by consulting the source for the fable, the reader can reassure himself (or herself) that the animal in question is not suffering from a gender-identity crisis—unless, of course, the animal is a hyena (see Fable 365).

Finally, the notes to the fables contain a number of proverbs. These include Greek and Latin proverbs which I have often cited from Erasmus’ *Adagia;* although it was first published in the sixteenth century, this remains a definitive reference work for the Greek and Latin proverb traditions (I have also included some citations from the *Emblem* book of Alciato, Erasmus’ somewhat younger contemporary). In addition to the Greek and Latin proverbs, there are also some English proverbs, often taken from the early English translations of Aesop’s fables by Caxton (late fifteenth century) and Sir Roger L’Estrange (late seventeenth century). These proverbs are meant to suggest to the reader the broader tradition of folk wisdom (Greek, Latin, or English) in which the fables of Aesop can be more fully understood and appreciated. For the same reason, I have included references in the notes to the ancient natural-history writers, such as Pliny (first century CE) and Aelian (early third

century CE), who provide important information about the animal lore and legends that often contributed to the plots of the fables.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anonymous Greek Fables

The anonymous Greek fables translated here are taken from the first edition of Émile Chambry for the Belles Lettres Paris (series: 1925–6); fables marked with an asterisk are found only in Chambry's first edition. An English translation of Chambry's second edition by Robert and Olivia Temple is published in the Penguin Classics series (London: 1998).

Babrius

The texts of Babrius generally follow Ben Perry's edition for the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: 1965), which includes an English translation.

Phaedrus

The texts of Phaedrus generally follow Perry's Loeb edition (1965), which includes an English translation. There is also a recent English translation of Phaedrus by P. F. Widdows (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).

Avianus

The texts of Avianus are taken from the edition by J. W. Duff and A. M. Duff for the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: 1934,

including an English translation). There is also a recent English translation by David Slavitt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993).

Life of Aesop

Fables from the *Life of Aesop* follow the recent edition by Franco Ferrari published in the BUR series (Milan: 1997). For an English translation, we can thank William Hansen for having reprinted Lloyd Daly's translation, originally published in *Aesop without Morals* (New York: Yoseloff, 1961), in his recent *Anthology of Greek Popular Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

Aphthonius

The texts of Aphthonius are taken from F. Sbordone's edition in the *Rivista Indo-Greco-Italica*, 16 (1932) 47–57; there is no English translation available.

Syntipas

The texts of Syntipas are taken from Ben Perry's *Aesopica* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1952); there is no English translation available.

The Romulus Fables

There are a considerable number of fables from the Romulus collections which are reprinted in Ben Perry's *Aesopica* (1952); fables not cited by Perry can be found in Leopold Hervieux's *Les Fabulistes latins II* (Paris: 1893–9). There is no English translation

available of the Romulus collections, although the fables cited by Perry are translated into English (sometimes in paraphrase form) in the appendix to his Loeb edition of Babrius and Phaedrus.

Ademar

The fables of Ademar follow Ferruccio Bertini and Paolo Gatti in *Favolisti Latini Medievali* (Genova: 1988), supplemented by the comments and observations in Ferruccio Bertini's *Interpreti medievali di Fedro* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 1998), which contains a detailed analysis of Ademar's fables and his sources.

Odo

The Latin texts of Odo are from Leopold Hervieux, *Les Fabulistes latins IV* (Paris: 1893–9) and there is also an English translation by John C. Jacobs (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985).

Miscellaneous Greek and Latin Fables

The miscellaneous Greek and Latin fables that do not derive from the sources listed above are taken from Perry's *Aesopica (1952)*.

Erasmus

The proverbs of Erasmus are cited from the *Adagia* in *Opera Omnia* (Hildesheim: 1961, a reprint of the 1703 edition). There is an English translation by Margaret Phillips and R. A. B. Mynors included in the University of Toronto's *Collected Works of Erasmus*

(1982–92, three additional volumes forthcoming). This English translation of Erasmus is the best place for English readers to consult the Greek proverb collections attributed to Zenobius, Apostolius, and others; the Greek texts of the proverb collections are published in E. Leutsch and F. G. Schneidewin, *Corpus Paroemiographorum Graecorum* (Gottingen: 1839–51).

Alciato

The emblems of Andrea Alciato (also known as Alciati) are translated from the *Emblematum liber*, or the *Book of Emblems*, which was published in various editions throughout the sixteenth century. There is an English translation by Betty Knott (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996).

English Versions of Aesop

The morals of Caxton are cited from *Caxton's Aesop* as edited by R. T. Lenaghan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967). The morals of Roger L'Estrange are cited from his *Aesop's Fables* (recently republished by the Everyman's Library of Children's Classics (New York: 1992), although his seventeenth-century English prose is surely impenetrable to actual children).

Eastern Traditions

There is a comprehensive English translation of the Buddhist *jataka* tales by E. G. Cowell and others (London: Routledge and Kegan

Paul, 1895; reprinted 1973). For the *Panchatantra* see the recent English translation by Patrick Olivelle for Oxford World's Classics, *The Pañcatantra* (Oxford: 1997). There are many English translations of selected poems by Rumi, the thirteenth-century Persian poet, but the only complete English translation of the *Mathnawi* is the edition of R. A. Nicholson (recently reprinted, Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1990). In addition, it is worth noting that parts of the *Life of Aesop* depend on the Semitic legends of Ahikar or Ahiqar. The *Story of Ahiqar* was a widely popular text in the ancient Near East, and is extant in Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions, as well as in Armenian and Greek; in English, see James M. Lindenberg, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983). Perry's Loeb edition of Babrius and Phaedrus provides an extremely valuable survey of the parallels between the Aesopic fable tradition and the traditions of ancient Mesopotamia.

European Fables

The medieval Hebrew fables of Berechiah ha-Nakdan were translated into English by Moses Hadas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967). There are numerous translations of the fables of the medieval poet Marie de France, including a recent translation into English verse by Harriet Spiegel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987). John E. Keller and L. Clark Kenting have published an English translation of the first printed edition of Aesop's fables in Spain (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1993). The seventeenth-century Yiddish fables of Reb Moshe

Wallich were translated by Eli Katz (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994). There are numerous translations of the seventeenth-century French fables of Jean de la Fontaine, including a complete edition in English verse by Norman Spector (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

Fable Scholarship in English

There is very little scholarship on Aesop in English, with the exception of several recent volumes published by Brill. One of these new volumes has already been mentioned, Gert-Jan van Dijk's *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi* (Mnemosyne Supplementum 166: 1997), and now there is a two-volume English translation of Francisco Rodríguez Adrados's massive study, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable* (Leiden, Brill: 1999–2000). Running to almost 1,500 pages, this study contains an abundance of useful material, but its entire approach to the early history of the fable is predicated on a very tenuous reconstruction of the lost fable collections of Demetrius of Phalerum and other Hellenistic Greek sources for which there is no direct textual evidence. Much of Rodríguez Adrados's effort is directed towards extracting fragments of Greek poetry from the prose versions of the fables, an eccentric endeavour that will have very little meaning for English-language readers who do not know Greek.

Further Reading in Oxford World's Classics

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Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield, ed. Carolyn Dewald.

La Fontaine, Jean de, *Selected Fables*, trans. Christopher Wood, ed. Maya Slater.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville, ed. E. J. Kenney.

Petronius, *The Satyricon*, trans, and ed. P. G. Walsh.

The Romance of Reynard the Fox, trans. and ed. Roy Owen.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE FABLES

BCE

8th century	Aesopic fable in Greek poet Hesiod.
7th century	Fables in the Greek poet Archilochus (fragments).
6th century	Formation of Buddhist *jataka* tales, Indian *Panchatantra*.
5th century	Writings of Herodotus provide evidence for Aesop; fables in the Greek comic playwright Aristophanes.
4th century	Socrates ponders Aesop's fables while awaiting execution (Plato, *Phaedo* 60b); fables used by Greek orators Demades and Demosthenes; fables discussed by Greek philosopher Aristotle; Demetrius of Phalerum collects Greek fables?
3rd century	Further collections of fables in Greek?
2nd century	Fable in the Latin poet Ennius.
1st century	Fables in the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, the Roman poet Horace, and the Roman historian Livy.

CE

1st century	Phaedrus writes Latin fables in verse; *Life of Aesop* composed? Babrius writes Greek fables in verse; fables in the Greek prose writer Plutarch.
2nd century	Fables in Lucian, Achilles Tatius, Athenaeus, Aulus Gellius, and other writers.
3rd century	Greek fables of the *Collectio Augustana*.
4th century	Aphthonius writes Greek fables in prose.
5th century	Avianus writes Latin fables in verse.
10th century	'Romulus'—poems of Phaedrus in prose paraphrase form.
11th century	Ademar adapts 'Romulus' (and Phaedrus?) into Latin prose; 'Syntipas'—Andreopulus translates Syriac fables into Greek prose.
12th century	Latin verse fables of Alexander Neckam and Walter of England; French verse fables of Marie de France.
13th century	Islamic poet Rumi writes fables in Persian verse; Odo of Cheriton writes fables in Latin prose.
14th century	John of Sheppey writes fables in Latin prose.
15th century	Perotti transcribes *Appendix* containing Latin fables of

	Phaedrus; Bonus Accursius prints anonymous Greek fables; Steinhowel prints fables in German and Latin; Caxton prints fables in English.
16th century	Adages of Erasmus; *Emblems* of Alciato.
17th century	Aesop's Fables of Roger L'Estrange; fables in French verse by Jean de La Fontaine.

AESOP'S FABLES

AESOP, THE POPULAR FAVOURITE

Fable 1 (Chambry 96 = Perry 63)

Demades and the Athenians

The orator Demades was trying to address his Athenian audience. When he failed to get their attention, he asked if he might tell them an Aesop's fable. The audience agreed, so Demades began his story. 'The goddess Demeter, a swallow, and an eel were walking together down the road. When they reached a river, the swallow flew up in the air and the eel jumped into the water.' Demades then fell silent. The audience asked, 'And what about the goddess Demeter?' 'As for Demeter,' Demades replied, 'she is angry at all of you for preferring Aesop's fables to politics!'

So it is that foolish people disregard important business in favour of frivolities.

> NOTE: Demades (d. 319 BCE) was an Athenian orator and diplomat. Demeter was a Greek agricultural goddess and was of special importance to the Athenians because of the cult of the Eleusinian Mysteries (see Fable 559).

Fable 2 (pseudo-Plutarch, *Lives of the Ten Orators* 848a = Perry 460)

Demosthenes and the Athenians

They say that during an assembly in Athens, Demosthenes was prevented from making his speech, so he told the audience he wanted to say just a few words. When the audience had fallen silent, Demosthenes began his tale. ‘It was summertime, and a young man had hired a donkey to take him from Athens to Megara. At midday, when the sun was blazing hot, the young man and the donkey’s driver both wanted to sit in the donkey’s shadow. They began to jostle one another, fighting for the spot in the shade. The driver maintained that the man had rented the donkey but not his shadow, while the young man claimed that he had rented both the donkey and all the rights thereto.’ Having told this much of the story, Demosthenes then turned his back on the audience and began to walk away. The Athenians shouted at him to stop and begged him to finish the story. ‘Indeed!’ said Demosthenes. ‘You want to hear all about the donkey’s shadow, but you refuse to pay attention when someone talks to you about serious matters!’

NOTE: Demosthenes (d. 322 BCE) was a renowned orator of fourth-century Athens. Megara is a Greek city on the Saronic Gulf to the west of Athens. The ‘donkey’s shadow’ was an ancient cliché for something of trivial importance (see, for example, Plato, *Phaedrus* 260c and Aristophanes, *Wasps* 191),

I · THE FABLES

FABLES ABOUT SLAVES AND MASTERS

Fable 3 (Babrius 100 = Perry 346)

The Wolf, the Dog, and the Collar

A comfortably plump dog happened to run into a wolf. The wolf asked the dog where he had been finding enough food to get so big and fat. ‘It is a man,’ said the dog, ‘who gives me all this food to eat.’ The wolf then asked him, ‘And what about that bare spot there on your neck?’ The dog replied, ‘My skin has been rubbed bare by the iron collar which my master forged and placed upon my neck.’ The wolf then jeered at the dog and said, ‘Keep your luxury to yourself then! I don’t want anything to do with it, if my neck will have to chafe against a chain of iron!’

> NOTE: Caxton (3.15) adds this epimythium: ‘Therefore there is no rychesse gretter than lyberte | For lyberte is better than alle the gold of the world.’

Fable 4 (Chambry 264 = Perry 183)

The Onager, the Donkey, and the Driver

An onager saw a donkey standing in the sunshine. The onager approached the donkey and congratulated him on his good physical

condition and excellent diet. Later on, the onager saw that same donkey bearing a load on his back and being harried by a driver who was beating the donkey from behind with a club. The onager then declared, ‘Well, I am certainly not going to admire your good fortune any longer, seeing as you pay such a high price for your prosperity!’

NOTE: The onager, or wild ass, once roamed the plains of central Asia. The word onager is from the Greek *onos*, ‘donkey’, and *agros*, ‘field’.

Fable 5 (Syntipas 30 = Perry 411)

The Donkey, the Onager, and the Lion

An onager saw a donkey labouring under a heavy load and he made fun of the donkey’s enslavement. ‘Lucky me!’ said the onager. ‘I am free from bondage and do not have to work for anyone else, since I have grass near at hand on the hillsides, while you rely on someone else to feed you, forever oppressed by slavery and its blows!’ At that very moment a lion happened to appear on the scene. He did not come near the donkey since the donkey’s driver was standing beside him. The onager, however, was all alone, so the lion attacked and devoured him.

The story shows that people who are obstinate and insubordinate come to a bad end because they get carried away by their own sense of stubbornness and refuse to ask others for assistance.

Fable 6 (Phaedrus 4.1 = Perry 164)

The Donkey, the Priests, and the Tambourines

It is not enough that a man who is born under an unlucky star leads an unhappy life: the bitter affliction of his fate pursues him even after he is dead.

The Galli, those priests of the goddess Cybebe, used a donkey to carry their luggage when they went around begging for alms. When their donkey finally died, overcome by work and the whip, they stripped his hide and made themselves some tambourines. When someone asked them what they had done with their darling donkey, the priests replied, 'He thought that once he died he would get some rest, but he keeps on getting beaten just the same!'

NOTE: For another fable about the Galli, priests of the Anatolian goddess Cybebe (or Cybele), see Fable 244. These priests were famous for their raucous music, including the use of tambourines.

Fable 7 (Phaedrus *App*. 20 = Perry 548)

Aesop and the Runaway Slave

A slave who was running away from his cruel master happened to meet Aesop, who knew him as a neighbour. 'What's got you so excited?' asked Aesop. 'Father Aesop—a name you well deserve since you are like a father to me—I'm going to be perfectly frank, since you can be safely trusted with my troubles. There's plenty of whipping and not enough food. I'm constantly sent on errands out

to the farm without any provisions for the journey. If the master dines at home, I have to wait on him all night long; if he is invited somewhere else, I have to lie outside in the gutter until dawn. I should have earned my freedom by now, but my hairs have gone gray and I'm still slaving away. If I had done anything to deserve this, I would stop complaining and suffer my fate in silence. But the fact is that I never get enough to eat and my cruel master is always after me. For these reasons, along with others that it would take too long to tell you, I've decided to go wherever my feet will lead me.' 'Well,' said Aesop, 'listen to what I say: if you must endure such hardship without having done anything wrong, as you say, then what is going to happen to you now that you really are guilty of something?' With these words of advice, Aesop scared the slave into giving up his plans of escape.

> NOTE: There is a promythium appended to the fable in Perotti's Appendix: 'The fable shows that you should not add one problem to another.'

Fable 8 (Chambry 164 = Perry 131)

The Jackdaw and the String

A man caught a jackdaw and tied the bird's foot with a piece of string so that he could give the bird to his child as a present. The jackdaw, however, could not stand to live in human society, so when they let him loose for just a moment, he ran away. But when he got back to his nest, the string became entangled in the branches,

so that the jackdaw was unable to fly. As he was dying, the bird said to himself, ‘How stupid of me! Since I could not stand being a slave in human society, I have brought about my own death.’

This story is appropriate for people who want to rescue themselves from some moderate difficulties and, without realizing it, find themselves in even more serious trouble.

Fable 9 (Maximus of Tyre, *Orations* 19 = Perry 465)

The Butcher, the Shepherd, and the Lamb

A shepherd and a butcher were walking along the road together. They saw a plump little lamb who had wandered away from the flock and had been left behind by his fellow sheep. The shepherd and the butcher both rushed to grab the lamb. This was back in the days when animals spoke the same language as people, so the lamb asked the two men why they wanted to grab him and carry him off. After the lamb found out what they both did, he turned and offered himself to the shepherd. ‘You are nothing but an executioner of sheep,’ he said to the butcher, ‘and your hands are stained with the blood of the flock! This man, on the other hand, rejoices if we thrive and prosper.’

> NOTE: Maximus of Tyre was a Greek philosopher and sophist of the second century CE.

Fable 10 (Chambry 273* = Perry 179)

The Donkey and His Masters

There was a donkey who worked for a gardener. Because the gardener made the donkey work very hard but gave him very little food, the donkey prayed to Zeus to take him away from the gardener and give him to another master, so Zeus sent Hermes to sell the donkey to a potter. The donkey also found this situation unbearable, since he was forced to carry even heavier loads than before. He called upon Zeus again, and this time Zeus arranged for the donkey to be purchased by a tanner. When the donkey saw the kind of work the tanner did, he said, 'Oh, it would have been better for me to have kept on working for my previous masters in a state of starvation! Now I have ended up in a place where I won't even get a proper burial after I die.'

The story shows that slaves miss their former masters the most when they have had some experience with their new ones.

> NOTE: Zeus is the supreme god of the Greek pantheon, and Hermes is his messenger, often serving as Zeus's agent in earthly affairs. For a similar fable about ever-worsening masters, see Fable 28.

Fable 11 (Phaedrus 1.15 = Perry 476)

The Old Man, the Donkey, and the Pack Saddles

When there is a change in government, nothing changes for the poor folk except their master's name.

A cowardly old man had led his donkey out to pasture. At the unexpected sound of the enemy approaching, the old man was stricken with terror and tried to persuade the donkey to run away so

that he wouldn't be captured. The donkey obstinately asked the old man, 'Tell me, do you suppose the victor will make me carry two pack saddles instead of one?' The old man said he did not think so. 'I rest my case,' concluded the donkey. 'What difference does it make who my master is, if I always carry one saddle at a time?'

Fable 12 (Phaedrus 1.30 = Perry 485)

The Frogs and the Battle of the Bulls

Poor folk suffer when the high and mighty are at war with one another.

A frog looked out from her pond and saw a battle taking place between the bulls. 'Oh no!' she said, 'There is terrible danger in store for us.' Another frog asked her why she said this, since the bulls were fighting for control of the herd in their home far away from the frogs. The first frog explained, 'While their habitat may be separate from ours and our species not the same, the bull who is driven from the lordship of the meadow will come to find a secret hiding place here in the marsh, crushing us beneath his heavy hooves. That is why their frenzy is a matter of life and death for us!'

Fable 13 (Babrius 90 = Perry 341)

The Lion and the Fawn

The lion had gone into a raging frenzy. A fawn saw him from the woods and said, 'Oh, we really are in trouble! Now that the lion is enraged, he will not stop at anything—and he was already more than we could bear even before he went out of his mind!'

FABLES ABOUT ANIMAL KINGS

Fable 14 (Phaedrus 1.5 = Perry 339)

The Lion, the Cow, the She-Goat, and the Sheep

An alliance made with the high and mighty can never be trusted. This little fable proves my point.

A cow and a she-goat and a long-suffering sheep decided to become the lion's companions. They went into the forest together and there they caught an extremely large stag which they divided into four portions. Then the lion said, 'I claim the first portion by right of my title, since I am called the king; the second portion you will give me as your partner; then, because I am strongest, the third portion is mine—and woe betide anyone who dares to touch the fourth!' In this way the wicked lion carried off all the spoils for himself.

NOTE: Sir Roger L'Estrange appends this apt proverb: 'He that has the Staff in his Hand will be his own Carver.' In Greek versions of this fable (e.g. Chambry 207), the alliance is between a lion and an onager. For another story about the 'lion's share', see Fable 15 (following).

Fable 15 (Odo 20 = Perry 149)

The Wolf, the Fox, and the Lion Dividing the Spoils

The lion, the wolf, and the fox agreed to go hunting together. The fox caught a goose, the wolf caught a fat ram, and the lion caught a

scrawny cow. Then it was time to eat. The lion told the wolf to divide their catch. The wolf said, ‘Let each one take what he has caught: the lion will take the cow, I’ll take the ram, and the fox will take the goose.’ The lion was enraged and, raising his paw, he used his claws to strip the wolf’s head of all its fur and skin. The lion then ordered the fox to divide the spoils. The fox said, ‘My lord, you should eat as much of the fat ram as you want, since its meat is tender, then you should eat as much of the goose as you want, but you should eat the cow’s flesh only in moderation, since it is so tough. Whatever is left over you can give to us, your servants.’ ‘Well done,’ said the lion. ‘Who taught you how to do such a good job of dividing the spoils?’ The fox said, ‘My lord, I have learned from my associate’s red cap: his excoriated skull provides a very vivid lesson.’

NOTE: This allusion to the red cardinal’s cap is typical of Odo’s medieval fables, which are clearly situated in Christian monastic culture. This same fable is also used by the great Islamic poet, Rumi (*Mathnami* 1.3013 ff.), minus the reference to the cardinal’s red cap.

Fable 16 (Romulus 3.20 = Perry 514)

The Monkey and the Lion’s Breath

When the lion made himself king of the beasts, he wanted to be known for his fairness, so he gave up his old habits and contented himself with a limited diet just as the other animals did, committed to dispensing justice with complete honesty. As time went by,

however, the lion's resolution began to waver. Since he was not able to alter his natural inclinations, he began to take certain animals aside in private and ask them whether or not his breath smelled bad. It was a clever strategy: the animals who said that it smelled bad and the animals who said it did not were all killed just the same and the lion was thus able to satisfy his appetite. After he had slaughtered a number of the animals in this way, the lion turned to the monkey and asked how his breath smelled. The monkey exclaimed that the lion's breath smelled of cinnamon, as if it were the very altar of the gods. The lion was ashamed to slaughter someone who said such nice things, so he changed his tactics and fooled the monkey with a newly devised stratagem. The lion pretended that he was sick. The doctors came right away, of course, and when they checked the lion's veins and found that his pulse was normal, they ordered him to eat some food that would be light on his stomach, thus alleviating his nausea. 'Kings may eat what they like,' admitted the lion. 'And I've never tried monkey meat … I would like to have a taste of that.' No sooner said than done: the obsequious monkey was quickly killed so that the lion could eat him immediately.

The penalty for speaking and for keeping silent is one and the same.

NOTE: Cinnamon was an extremely valuable and exotic substance in the ancient Graeco-Roman world and in medieval Europe, travelling all the way from the 'Spice Islands' of Indonesia through Arabia to north Africa and ports on the Mediterranean.

Fable 17 (Chambry 205 = Perry 258)

The Wolf, the Fox, and the Ailing Lion

The lion had grown old and sick and was lying in his cave. All the animals, except for the fox, had come to visit their king. The wolf seized this opportunity to denounce the fox in front of the lion, complaining that the fox showed no respect for the lion, who was the common master of them all. Indeed, the fox had not even come to pay the ailing lion a visit! The fox arrived just in time to hear the end of the wolf's speech. The lion roared at the fox, but the fox asked for a chance to explain herself. 'After all,' said the fox, 'which one of all the animals assembled here has helped you as I have, travelling all over the world in order to seek out and discover from the doctors a remedy for your illness?' The lion ordered the fox to describe the remedy immediately, and the fox replied, 'You must flay a living wolf and wrap yourself in his skin while it is still warm.' When the wolf had been killed, the fox laughed and said, 'It is better to put your master in a good mood, not a bad one.'

The story shows that someone who plots against others falls into his own trap.

NOTE: For a similar story about a goat and a donkey, see Fable 147.

Fable 18 (Ademar 59 = Perry 142)

The Fox, the Lion, and the Footprints

A lion had grown old and weak. He pretended to be sick, which was just a ruse to make the other animals come and pay their respects so that he could eat them all up, one by one. The fox also came to see the lion, but she greeted him from outside the cave. The lion asked the fox why she didn't come in. The fox replied, 'Because I see the tracks of those going in, but none coming out.'

Other people's lives are lessons in how we can avoid danger: it is easy to enter the house of a powerful man, but once you are inside, it may already be too late to get out.

> NOTE: The tracks leading into the lion's cave were a well-known cliché in the ancient world (e.g. Horace, *Epistles* 1.1.74–74: 'The footsteps frighten me: they all face in towards you with none coming back out').

Fable 19 (Babrius 106 = Perry 337)

The Lion, the Fox, and the Monkey Serving Dinner

There was a lion who strove to emulate the best sort of life lived in human society. He made his home inside a spacious den and tried to show genuine kindness to all those whom he recognized as the elite beasts of the mountain. His den often hosted a large crowd of such animals, who gathered together in a company and treated one another with civility. The lion would befriend and entertain them according to the rules of hospitality, placing before each of his guests their favourite dish, made with ingredients that the lion knew would give them pleasure. There was a fox who lived with the lion

as his friend and companion, and the two of them were very happy together. Meanwhile, an elderly monkey served as the carver at the feasts, distributing the portions of meat to the lion's guests at dinner. Whenever there was a guest who was not one of the regular party, the monkey would set before him the same portion which he offered his master, namely, the quarry that the lion had seized in his latest hunting expedition. On these occasions, the fox received leftovers from the day before, and less than her usual portion. One day the lion happened to notice that the fox was pointedly refusing to speak and that she refrained from the meat served at dinner. The lion asked her what was the matter. 'My wise fox,' said the lion, 'speak to me as you used to do! Cheer up and take part in the banquet, my dear.' But the fox said, 'O lion, best among all the species of beasts, I am sick at heart and deeply worried. It is not only the present situation that distresses me; I am also saddened by things which I see are yet to come. If some new guest arrives with every passing day, one after the other, this will become a matter of custom and soon I will not even have leftover meat for my dinner.' The lion was amused and smiled a lion's smile. 'Blame the monkey for all that,' he said. 'It is his fault, not mine.'

NOTE: For an even more elaborate account of the friendship between the lion king and his companion, the fox, see Fable 600.

Fable 20 (Babrius 102 = Perry 334)

The Hare and the Lion's Justice

There was once a lion king who did not have a bad temper. In fact, he never took any pleasure in acting violently but was instead mild and just, as if he were a human being. During this lion's reign, so they say, all the wild animals assembled to present their petitions and receive verdicts in their disputes. Every animal was called to account: the wolf for what he had done to the lamb, the leopard for what she had done to the wild goat, the tiger for what he had done to the deer, and so on. In the end, all the animals were at peace with one another. The timid hare then proclaimed, 'Now has come the day for which I have always prayed, when even the weak creatures are feared by the strong!'

Fable 21 (Aristotle, *Politics* 1284a = Perry 450)

The Lions and the Hares

Only a ridiculous person would try to make laws to govern the [most superior members of a society. Indeed, those gods among men] would probably respond as did the lions in the story of Antisthenes when the hares harangued the assembly, holding that everyone was to be considered of equal worth.

> NOTE: The *bon mot* attributed here to Antisthenes was apparently so well known that Aristotle only needed to allude to the lions' words, presumably something like: 'You speak well, hares, but where are your teeth and claws?' Antisthenes (d. 365 BCE) was a philosopher associated with the 'Cynic' school; see Fable 85 for a fable about Diogenes the Cynic philosopher.

FABLES ABOUT CHOOSING A KING

Fable 22 (Syntipas 53 = Perry 219)

The Peacock Elected King of the Birds

There were once some birds who gathered together for a group assembly and debated amongst themselves who was best suited to rule. The peacock said to the other birds, 'The kingship suits me best, since I am remarkably beautiful and in the prime of life.' While the rest of the birds were satisfied with the peacock, the raven made his way into their midst and protested, 'Tell me, if you become king, what is going to happen when the eagle attacks us: are you strong enough to rescue us from his assault?'

The fable shows that the kingship is not suited for those who are resplendent with beauty, but rather for those who have physical prowess and other outstanding qualities.

NOTE: In other versions of this fable (e.g. Chambry 334), it is a jackdaw, not a raven, who criticizes the peacock.

Fable 23 (Chambry 145* = Perry 220)

The Camel and the Elephant

The dumb beasts wanted to elect a king from amongst their ranks. The camel and the elephant were the two leading candidates because of their size and their strength. The monkey, however, argued that they were both unqualified. 'The camel cannot rule us

because she doesn't have the guts to fight against those who step out of line,' said the monkey, 'and there is also a potential danger if the elephant is king: how will he defend us from the little pigs?'

The fable shows that great achievements are often blocked by some small thing which prevents their realization.

NOTE: The monkey complains that the camel is literally lacking in 'gall' (for the camel's lack of a gall bladder, see Aristotle, *Parts of Animals* 4.2). Elephants were proverbially afraid of pigs, as discussed in Aelian, *Characteristics of Animals* 1.38.

Fable 24 (Chambry 38* = Perry 81)

The Monkey Elected King of the Animals

At an assembly of the dumb beasts, the monkey did a dance. The performance was a great success and the animals elected the monkey to be their king. But the fox was jealous of the monkey, so when she saw some meat lying in a trap, she led the monkey there and told him that she had found a treasure. The fox explained that she had not taken it for herself because of the king's prerogative. Instead, she had guarded this royal prize just for him. She then told the monkey to go ahead and take it. The monkey recklessly put his hand in the trap and was caught. When he accused the fox of luring him into an ambush, the fox replied, 'O you monkey! How can you rule over the dumb beasts when you yourself are such an idiot?'

The story shows that the same is true for people who take up some business without thinking about it first: they meet with disaster and become laughing-stocks as well.

NOTE: A story about the fox challenging the monkey was already attested in a fragment of the Greek poet Archilochus, *c.*650 BCE, which is perhaps a version of this same fable (frag. 185–7 West). For a different story about monkeys dancing, see Fable 352.

Fable 25 (Phaedrus 1.31 = Perry 486)

The Doves and the Kite

The person who turns to a dishonest scoundrel for help in times of trouble will be ruined, not rescued.

The doves kept having to run away from the kite, eluding death through the swiftness of their wings. The rapacious kite then decided to try some deceptive advice, fooling the defenceless flock by means of a trick. 'Why do you prefer this anxious way of life,' he asked, 'when instead you could strike up an agreement with me and make me your king, so that I would keep you safe from all possible danger?' The doves were persuaded by the kite's advice and turned themselves over to his care. But as soon as he was made king, the kite began to feast on his subjects one by one, wielding supreme authority with the fierceness of his talons. Then one of the survivors said, 'This is the punishment we deserve, since we put our lives in the hands of this thieving villain!'

Fable 26 (Odo 1 = Perry 262)

The Trees Elect a King

The trees came together so that they could anoint a king to rule over them. ‘Please be our ruler,’ they said to the olive tree. The olive tree said in reply, ‘Why would I abandon the richness of my oil, which is valued by both gods and mortals, in order to become the leader of the trees?’ They came to the fig tree and said, ‘Agree to rule over us.’ The fig tree answered, ‘Why would I relinquish my sweetness and delightful fruit in order to become the leader of the trees;’ They came to the vine, hoping that the vine might rule over them, but the vine answered, ‘Why would I relinquish the wine which brings joy both to God and to mankind?’ And so the vine refused to be their leader. The trees then said to the thorn bush, ‘Rule over us.’ The thorn bush replied, ‘If indeed you have resolved to make me your king, come and rest under my shadow, and if you refuse, a fire will come forth from the thorn bush and devour the cedars of Lebanon!’

NOTE: This fable comes from the Hebrew Bible, *Judges* 9: 8 and it became part of the Aesopic tradition only in the Middle Ages. The version cited here is the opening story in Odo’s thirteenth-century Latin collection of Aesopic fables; in the Greek tradition, the fable of the trees is found in a Byzantine collection which probably dates to the fifteenth century.

Fable 27 (Ademar 21 = Perry 44)

Jupiter and the Frogs

While the frogs were hopping about in the freedom of their pond they began shouting to Jupiter that they wanted a king who could hold their dissolute habits in check. Jupiter laughed and bestowed on the frogs a small piece of wood which he dropped all of a sudden into their pond. As the wood splashed lightly into the water, it terrified the timid frogs. They plunged into the mud and hid there a long time until one frog happened to raise her head cautiously up out of the water. After studying the king, she summoned the other frogs. Putting aside their fear, the frogs all raced over and began jumping on the piece of wood, rudely making fun of it. When the frogs had showered their king with shame and scorn, they asked Jupiter to send them another one. Jupiter was angry that they had made fun of the king he had given them, so he sent them a water-snake, who killed the frogs one by one with her piercing sting. As the water-snake was happily eating her fill, the useless creatures ran away, speechless in their fright. They secretly sent a message to Jupiter through Mercury, begging him to put a stop to the slaughter, but Jupiter replied, 'Since you rejected what was good in order to get something bad, you had better put up with it—or else something even worse might happen!'

NOTE: Jupiter and Mercury are the Roman names for Zeus and Hermes, respectively (see Fable 10 and its note).

Fable 28 (Odo 1e)

The Monk and the Abbots

This fable can be applied to bad rulers and worse successors.

A certain abbot gave his monks three-course meals but the monks said, 'This abbot gives us too little to eat. Let us pray to God that he will die soon.' Whether for this reason or for some other reason, the abbot soon died. He was replaced by another abbot, and this new abbot gave them two-course meals. The monks were angry and upset, so they said, 'Now we must pray even harder that God will deprive this man of his life, because he has deprived us of one of our courses.' The abbot then died. He was replaced by a third abbot, who took away yet another course. The angry monks said, 'This one is the worst of all: he is starving us to death! Let us pray to God that he will die soon.' Then one of the monks said, 'Meanwhile, I will pray to God that he give this abbot a long life and keep him safe on our behalf.' The others were surprised and asked him why he said this. The monk explained, 'I see that our first abbot was bad, the second one worse, and this third abbot is the worst of all. I am afraid that when this one dies, he will be replaced by one who is even worse, and then we really will die of starvation!'

Hence the saying: Bad situations rarely get better.

NOTE: Odo also quotes this proverb in English: 'Seilde corned se betere.'

Fable 29 (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.20 = Perry 427)

The Hedgehog, the Fox, and the Ticks

Aesop was defending a demagogue at Samos who was on trial for his life when he told this story: ‘A fox was crossing a river but she got swept by the current into a gully. A long time passed and she couldn’t get out. Meanwhile, there were ticks swarming all over the fox’s body, making her quite miserable. A hedgehog wandered by and happened to see the fox. He took pity on her and asked if he should remove the ticks, but the fox refused. The hedgehog asked the reason why, and the fox replied, “These ticks have taken their fill of me and are barely sucking my blood at this point, but if you take these ticks away, others will come and those hungry new ticks will drink up all the blood I have left!” And the same is true for you, people of Samos: this man will do you no harm since he is already wealthy, but if you condemn him to death, others will come who do not have any money, and they will rob you blind!’

NOTE: According to Herodotus (2.134), Aesop lived on the island of Samos, a Greek island in the Aegean Sea, near the coast of modern Turkey.

FABLES ABOUT THE FLOCK

Fable 30 (Chambry 216* = Perry 342)

The Wolves and the Dogs

The wolves wanted to make friends with the dogs, so they said, ‘Since we have so much in common, why don’t you treat us as your brothers and friends? It is merely our attitude that divides us. We

wolves all live a life of freedom, while you dogs are the slaves of people who make you wear collars around your necks and who beat you with sticks whenever it pleases them. And that is not your only hardship: you even have to guard their flocks and, what's worse, when they are eating their dinner, they toss you nothing but the bones as your share. If you will agree to our bargain, you can turn everything over to us and we'll eat our fill together.' Right away the dogs agreed, so the wolves attacked the flock and killed the dogs, so that the flock could not call out for help against the wolves.

The fable shows that these are the wages of people who betray their country.

Fable 31 (Babrius 93 = Perry 153)

The Wolves, the Sheep, and the Ram

The wolves sent messengers to the sheep, offering to swear a sacred oath of everlasting peace if the sheep would just agree to hand over the dogs for punishment. It was all because of the dogs, said the wolves, that the sheep and the wolves were at war with one another. The flock of sheep, those foolish creatures who bleat at everything, were ready to send the dogs away but there was an old ram among them whose deep fleece shivered and stood on end. 'What kind of negotiation is this!' he exclaimed. 'How can I hope to survive in your company unless we have guards? Even now, with the dogs keeping watch, I cannot graze in safety.'

NOTE: Demosthenes (see Fable 2) was said to have used this fable in an attempt to persuade the Athenians not to send their defenders into the hands of Alexander the Great (Plutarch, *Life of Demosthenes*) and Aesop tells the same story in *Life of Aesop* in an attempt to persuade the Samians not to turn him over to King Croesus. For a version of this story minus the wise ram, see Fable 32 (following).

Fable 32 (Ademar 43 = Perry 153)

The Wolves, the Sheep, and the Dogs

The sheep and the wolves were at war with one another but the sheep could not be defeated because the dogs' protection kept them safe. The wolves sent ambassadors to the sheep, pretending to offer an end to the hostilities if the sheep would let the wolves serve as their guardians. Hoping that this would establish an accord once and for all, the sheep agreed to all the wolves' demands. Afterwards, the wolves broke the treaty and were able to devour the sheep now that they no longer had anyone to protect them. The sheep recognized their error too late and regretted the decision they had made.

If you depend on someone else for help, you will be in trouble when that help is nowhere to be found.

Fable 33 (Chambry 231* = Perry 160)

The Sheep and the Injured Wolf

A wolf had been mauled by dogs and had cast himself down on the ground. Because of his injuries, the wolf could not go in search of food, so when he saw a sheep, he begged her to bring him something to drink from the river that ran nearby. ‘If you just give me something to drink,’ said the wolf, ‘I will find myself something to eat.’ The sheep replied, ‘But if I give you something to drink, then you will make me your dinner as well!’

The story can be used against a wicked man who hides his plots behind a veil of pretence.

> NOTE: L’Estrange appends this bit of commentary: ‘It is a Charitable and Christian Office to Relieve the Poor and the Distressed; but this Duty does not Extend to Sturdy Beggars, that while they are receiving Alms with one Hand, are ready to Beat out a Man’s Brains with the Other.’

Fable 34 (Chambry 313* = Perry 209)

The Shepherd and the Wolf Cubs

A shepherd found some wolf cubs and he brought them up, thinking that the fully grown wolves would both guard his flock and steal other people’s sheep to bring back to his sheepfold. But when the cubs grew up, the first thing they did was to destroy the man’s own flock. The man groaned and said, ‘It serves me right! Why didn’t I kill them when they were little?’

The story shows that when people harbour a criminal they become his first victims without even realizing it.

NOTE: Compare the Greek proverb, 'It is better not to raise a lion cub' (e.g. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1431; the disastrous results of raising such a cub are described in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 717 ff.).

Fable 35 (Chambry 315 = Perry 366)

The Shepherd and the Wolf Cub

A shepherd found a little wolf cub and raised it. Then, when the cub was bigger he taught it to steal from his neighbours' flocks. Once he had learned how to do this, the wolf said to the shepherd, 'Now that you have shown me how to steal, take care that many of your own sheep don't go missing!'

The fable shows that people who are vicious by nature will often injure their teachers once they have been taught to steal and be greedy.

Fable 36 (Chambry 314 = Perry 267)

The Shepherd, the Wolf Cub, and the Wolf

A shepherd found a newborn wolf cub. Taking it home, he raised it with his dogs. After the cub had grown up, he would join the dogs in the chase if a prowling wolf ever stole one of the sheep. When the dogs were no longer able to keep up with the other wolf and turned back for home (as sometimes happened), the wolf would continue

the chase until he caught the other wolf and received an equal share of the prey, true to his wolf's nature. Then he too would go back home. If, however, no wolves came to seize the sheep, he would secretly slaughter one of the sheep and eat it together with the dogs. When the shepherd finally guessed what was happening, he hanged the wolf from a tree and killed him.

The fable shows that a wicked nature does not produce a good character.

NOTE: Compare the Greek proverb, 'Thief knows thief, wolf knows wolf' (Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1235[a]).

Fable 37 (Chambry 54 = Perry 37)

The Blind Man and the Cub

There was a blind man who was in the habit of identifying any animal that was placed in his hands by touching it. Once they gave him a wolf cub. Even after stroking the animal he was not sure of its identity, so he said, 'I am not sure whether it is the cub of a wolf or a fox or some similar creature, but I do know that this is not the kind of animal that should accompany a flock of sheep!'

In the same way bad people are revealed by their features.

NOTE: Some editors have conjectured that this was not a wolf cub (*lugkidiou*) but a lynx cub (*lugkidiou*).

Fable 38 (Chambry 229 = Perry 234)

The Wolf and the Shepherd

A wolf followed along after a flock of sheep without doing them any harm. At first the shepherd kept his eye on the wolf as a potential enemy to the flock and never let him out of his sight. But as the wolf continued to accompany the shepherd and did not make any kind of attempt to raid the flock, the shepherd eventually began to regard the wolf more as a guardian of the flock than as a threat. Then, when the shepherd happened to have to go to town, he commended the sheep to the wolf in his absence. The wolf seized his chance and attacked the sheep, slaughtering most of the flock. When the shepherd came back and saw that his flock had been utterly destroyed, he said, 'It serves me right! How could I have ever trusted my sheep to a wolf?'

The same is true of people: if you entrust your bank deposits to greedy men, you are certain to get robbed.

NOTE: 'Leaving the sheep to be watched by the wolves' was already a Roman proverb (e.g. Plautus, *Pseudolus* 141).

Fable 39 (Babrius 113 = Perry 365)

The Man, the Wolf, and the Dog

A man was gathering his sheep into the fold one evening and was about to enclose a tawny wolf inside with the flock. When the dog saw what he was doing, he said to the man, 'How can you be serious about protecting the sheep when you are introducing this creature among us?'

FABLES ABOUT SELF-DESTRUCTION

Fable 40 (Babrius 142 = Perry 302)

Zeus and the Oak Trees

Once upon a time the oak trees came to Zeus and lodged a complaint. ‘O Zeus, founder of our species and father of all plant life, if it is our destiny to be chopped down, why did you even cause us to grow?’ Zeus smiled and replied, ‘It is you yourselves who supply the means of your destruction: if you didn’t create all the handles, no farmer would have an axe in his house!’

NOTE: There is a similar Greek proverb, ‘The ox supplies his own whip’ (Erasmus, *Adages* 1.2.77).

Fable 41 (Ademar 44 = Perry 302)

The Axe and the Trees

When a man had made an axe, he asked the trees to give him a handle made of the hardest wood. The other trees selected the wood of the wild olive. The man took the handle and fitted it to his axe. Then, without a moment’s hesitation, he began to chop down the trees’ mighty branches and trunks, taking whatever he wanted. The oak tree then said to the ash, ‘It serves us right, since we gave our enemy the handle he asked for!’

You should think twice before offering anything to your enemies.

Fable 42 (Babrius 38 = Perry 303)

The Pine Tree and the Wedges

Some woodcutters splitting a wild pine tree drove wedges into the trunk, prying it apart and thus making their work easier. The pine tree groaned and said, 'I cannot blame the axe, who had no connection with my root, but these utterly despicable wedges are my own children. Pounded into me this way and that, they are going to tear me apart!'

This fable reminds everyone that the bad things that strangers do to you are never as terrible as the things done to you by the members of your own family.

Fable 43 (Aphthonius 32 = Perry 276)

The Eagle and the Arrow

A story about an archer, showing that it is bitter to be betrayed by one of your own.

An archer aimed at an eagle and let loose an arrow. The eagle was struck, and as he turned and looked at the shaft which was tipped with his own feathers, he said, 'Many are betrayed by the very things that they themselves have wrought.'

> NOTE: The proverbial motif of the eagle shot by his own feathers is also found in Aristophanes, *Birds* 808. For another fable about birds shot down with their own feathers, see Fable 488.

Fable 44 (Chambry 282 = Perry 238)

The Decoys and the Doves

A bird-catcher laid out his net, tying some tame doves to the net as decoys. He then stood off at a distance, waiting to see what would happen. Some wild doves flew up to the tame doves and became entangled in the knots of the net. When the bird-catcher ran up and began to grab them, the wild doves were angry at the tame doves, since the tame doves had not warned them about the trap even though they were all members of the same species. The tame doves replied, 'Nevertheless, it is better for us to protect the interests of our masters than to please our relations.'

The same is true about household servants: they should not be blamed when their devotion to the master of the house causes them to set aside any loyalty to their kinfolk.

Fable 45 (Syntipas 26 = Perry 265)

The Bird-catcher and the Partridge

A bird-catcher had captured a partridge and was ready to strangle her right there on the spot. The partridge wanted to save her life so she pleaded with the bird-catcher and said, 'If you release me from this snare, I will lure many partridges here and bring them to you.' The bird-catcher was made even more angry by this and he killed the partridge immediately.

This fable shows that someone who lays a trap for others will fall victim to it himself.

NOTE: For another fable about a partridge decoy, see Fable 123.

FABLES ABOUT MISALLIANCES

Fable 46 (Phaedrus 1.8 = Perry 156)

The Wolf and the Crane

If you think a scoundrel will reward you for a job well done, you are making two mistakes: first, you are helping someone who doesn't deserve it, and second, you will be lucky to escape unharmed.

A wolf swallowed a bone which got stuck in his throat. The pain was excruciating, so the wolf started looking for someone who could be induced to remove the accursed thing in exchange for a reward. The wolf asked each of the animals if they would help him, and finally the crane was convinced by the wolf's solemn promises. Trusting her long beak to the wolf's gaping maw, the crane carried out the dangerous cure. Yet when the crane demanded the promised reward, the wolf simply said, 'You ungrateful creature! You extracted your head unharmed from my mouth and still you ask for a reward?'

NOTE: Other versions of this story (e.g. Babrius 94) are about a heron, not a crane. The Buddhist *Javasakuna-jataka* tells the same story about a lion and a crane.

Fable 47 (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1393^{b} = Perry 269)

The Stag, the Horse, and the Man

There was a horse who was the sole owner of a meadow. Then a stag came and wreaked havoc in the meadow. The horse wanted to get revenge, so he asked a certain man if he would help him carry out a vendetta against the stag. The man agreed, provided that the horse took the bit in his mouth so that the man could ride him, wielding his javelin. The horse consented and the man climbed on his back, but instead of getting his revenge, the horse simply became a slave to the man.

> NOTE: In some versions of this story, it is a boar, not a stag, who provokes the horse's reckless anger (e.g. Phaedrus 4.4). There is an interesting version of this story in a fragment of the Greek historian Conon (cited in van Dijk 7T3), and the fable is also found in Horace, *Epistles* 1.10. 34 ff.

Fable 48 (Aphthonius 14 = Perry 194)

The Stork and the Cranes

A story about a stork, urging us not to associate with wicked people.

The cranes were making trouble for the farmer by snatching the seed he had scattered on the ground. There was a stork who associated with the cranes and lived together with them although he never did any harm to the farmer. When the farmer was fed up with the damage being done to his crops, he prepared a snare and

captured the stork together with the cranes. Thus the stork was actually held accountable for crimes he had never committed.

If you consort with wicked people, you will receive the same punishment they do.

Fable 49 (Syntipas 60 = Perry 228)

The Swans and the Geese

Some swans and some geese became friends and went out onto the meadows. As they were feeding contentedly together, they were discovered by hunters. The swans, owing to the swiftness of their bodies, were immediately able to take wing and fly away. The geese, however, were naturally more heavy and so they were left behind and caught by the hunters.

The fable represents people who are not whole-heartedly devoted to their friends but instead abandon them at the critical moment.

Fable 50 (Babrius 99 = Perry 335)

The Eagle and the Lion as Partners

An eagle flew up to a lion and asked him to be his partner. ‘I don’t see why not,’ replied the lion. ‘But first you must give me your long wing-feathers as a pledge that you will keep your promise. How will I be able to trust you as a friend if you do not stay here with me?’

Fable 51 (Syntipas 22 = Perry 256)

The Hares and the Foxes

The hares were at war with an eagle and they asked the foxes to be their allies. The foxes said in reply, ‘We would agree to be your allies, if we didn’t know what sort of creatures you are and who you are fighting against!’

This fable indicts people who attack someone who is more powerful than they are and thus bring ruin upon themselves.

Fable 52 (Avianus 11 = Perry 378)

The Two Pots

The banks of a river caved in, tossing two pots into the river where they were swept away together in the raging waters. Each of the pots had been created by a different technique from a different material: one was made of poured bronze and the other was moulded clay. There was thus an uneasy alliance between the two of them, one fragile and one unbreakable, as they moved along the winding course of the wandering stream. The bronze jar solemnly promised to keep her hulking progress at a distance from the other jar, not wanting to strike and shatter her. The jar of clay, meanwhile, was afraid that the heavier object might do damage to her lighter frame, because something slight can put no trust in something superior. ‘Although your words are reassuring,’ the clay pot said, ‘I cannot shake this fear from my soul. Whether the wave crashes me into you or you into me, in either case I will be the only victim of the catastrophe.’

NOTE: There is also a similar image at work in the Bible, Ecclesiasticus 13: 3: ‘What agreement shall the earthen pot have with the kettle? for if they knock one against the other, it shall be broken.’ (For a modern instance, compare Lord Steyne’s advice to Becky in Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, ch. 48: ‘You poor little earthenware pipkin, you want to swim down the stream along with the great copper kettles.’)

FABLES ABOUT USELESS ALLIES

Fable 53 (Ademar 53 = Perry 570)

The Goose and the Stork

A stork had gone to her usual pond and saw a goose there who kept plunging down deep into the water. The stork then asked the goose what she was doing and the goose replied, ‘We geese go down into the muddy bottom of the pond to look for food and to escape the hawk’s attack.’ The stork said, ‘I am stronger than the hawk! You should be friends with me, and I will allow you to scoff at that other bird!’ The goose agreed, and not long afterwards she called on the stork to come help her. The goose had not plunged into the water, so the hawk immediately swooped down and caught her up in his talons. As the hawk was about to devour her, the goose replied, ‘A wretched death awaits anyone who puts his trust in such a worthless defender!’

For people who expect to be defended by someone who cannot offer them any protection.

NOTE: There appears to be a gap between the hawk's attack and the goose's final remarks, since Ademar's version says that the goose 'replied' to someone. Because this story is extant only in Ademar, there are no other versions that can supply the missing words.

Fable 54 (Chambry 117 = Perry 90)

The Water-snake, the Viper, and the Frogs

There was a viper who used to go to a certain spring in order to drink, but he was driven away by a water-snake who was furious that the viper would not just stay on his own turf instead of encroaching on the water-snake's territory. Their dispute grew more and more fierce and finally the two of them decided to fight it out, agreeing that both the water and the land would be awarded to the winner. When the day for the fight had been decided, the frogs came to the viper and, since they hated the water-snake, they offered to be his allies and come to his aid during the battle. But when the battle began and the viper grappled with the water-snake, the frogs just sat there croaking, since they were not able to do anything else. In the end, the viper was victorious but he was furious with the frogs since they had failed to come to his aid as they had promised and, what was worse, they had sat there singing songs while he was doing battle. The frogs then said to the viper, 'But you should have known that we had nothing to offer you except the sound of our voices!'

The fable shows that when you need someone to lend a hand, mere words are no help at all.

NOTE: For a fable about the enmity between the frogs and the water-snake, see Fable 27.

Fable 55 (Chambry 202 = Perry 145)

The Dolphin and the Lion

A lion was wandering on the seashore when he saw a dolphin stick his head out of the water. The lion invited the dolphin to become his ally, explaining that they were perfectly suited to befriend and assist one another, given that the dolphin was the king of the sea creatures, while the lion ruled all the animals of the land. The dolphin agreed. Later on, the lion, who had long been at war with the wild bull, asked the dolphin for help. Although he wanted to help, the dolphin was unable to come out of the sea. The lion then reproached the dolphin for having betrayed him. The dolphin said in reply, 'I am not to blame! My nature is that of a sea creature, and it means that I cannot come out onto the land.'

The same is true of people. When we form friendships with one another, we must choose allies who can come to our aid in moments of peril.

Fable 56 (Ignatius Diaconus, *Tetrasticha* 2.7 = Perry 416)

The Bear, the Lion, and the Fox Go Hunting

The bear, the lion, and the fox went hunting together. While the lion and the bear tracked down their prey by their own efforts, the fox instead found a camel who had been tied to a post. She then went and told her companions that this was something they could catch.

NOTE: These *tetrasticha*, or 'four-line' poems, were composed by Ignatius the Deacon and his imitators in ninth-century Byzantium.

Fable 57 (Ademar 67 = Perry 574)

The Eagle and the Kite

An eagle was sitting sadly in her tree when she was joined by a kite. The kite said to the eagle, 'Why do I see you looking so sad?' The eagle replied, 'I cannot help but be sad at heart, since I need a mate who is my equal but I cannot find one anywhere.' The kite then said to the eagle, 'You should marry me! I am even stronger than you are, which makes me the ideal bird for you.' The eagle asked him, 'Just what kinds of prey are you able to catch?' The kite said, 'Well, on several occasions I have managed to capture an ostrich in my talons and eat it.' When she heard this, the eagle accepted the kite's proposal and married him. After the wedding ceremony and festivities were finished, the eagle said to the kite, 'Go and get us some of that prey which you promised.' The high-flying kite was only able to offer the eagle a nasty little mouse whose flesh was all putrid and rotten. The eagle said, 'Is this what you promised?' The kite replied, 'In order to make this most eminent match with you, I

had no choice but to agree to anything you asked, even if it meant promising something impossible.'

For women who want to marry men who are richer than they are and who find out afterwards that their husbands are worthless.

NOTE: Compare the medieval English proverb, *c*.1300: 'Nultow never, late ne skete | A goshawk maken of a Kete, | No faucon maken of busard, | no Hardy knyht mak of coward' (cited in *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*).

FABLES ABOUT SOLIDARITY

Fable 58 (Romulus 4.6 = Perry 575)

The Butcher and the Flock

Relatives and fiends who cannot agree with one another will come to a bad end, as the following fable tells us.

Some castrated sheep had been gathered together in a flock with the rams. Although the sheep realized that the butcher had come into the flock, they pretended not to see him. Even when they saw one of their own seized by the butcher's deadly hands and taken away to be slaughtered, still the sheep were not afraid. Foolishly, they said to one another, 'He keeps his hands off me, he keeps his hands off you; let him take whom he takes.' In the end, there was only one sheep left. This is what he reportedly said to the butcher when he saw that he too was about to be taken away: 'We deserve to be slaughtered one after another since we didn't realize what was

happening until it was too late. The fact is, as soon as we saw you here in our midst, back when we were all together, we should have killed you at once by smashing you between our horns.'

This fable shows that people who do not keep an eye out for their own safety will be utterly destroyed by evil.

> NOTE: This fable is strikingly similar to the 'first they came' parable of Pastor Martin Niemoeller (1892–1984): 'First they came for the Communists, but I was not a Communist so I did not speak out. Then they came for the Socialists and the Trade Unionists, but I was neither, so I did not speak out. Then they came for the Jews, but I was not a Jew so I did not speak out. And when they came for me, there was no one left to speak out for me.'

Fable 59 (Syntipas 13 = Perry 372)

The Two Bulls and the Lion

A lion was attacking two bulls, hoping to make a meal of them. The bulls, however, both opposed the lion with their horns. Once they had taken their stand, the bulls did not allow the lion to come between them. When the lion saw that he was powerless against the two bulls together, he slyly spoke to one of them and said, 'If you hand your partner over to me, I will keep you safe from harm.' In this way, he was able to seize both of the bulls.

This fable shows that the same is true of cities and people: when they are in agreement with one another, they do not allow their enemies to defeat

them, but if they refuse to co-operate, it is an easy matter for their enemies to destroy them.

Fable 60 (Babrius 85 = Perry 343)

The Dogs and Their Commander

During the war of the dogs and the wolves, the dog-assembly chose an Achaean to be their commander. Although he was an expert in the art of war, the commander waited and delayed. With fierce threats, the dogs urged him to advance and to engage in battle but the commander explained, 'Here is the reason why I delay and act with caution! One must always make plans with an eye to the future. All of the enemy whom I have seen are wolves, members of the same breed, whereas some of us are dogs from Crete, some are Molossian hounds, some are Acarnanians, others are Dolopians, while others boast of being from Cyprus or Thrace. Still others come from other places—what need is there to go on at length? We are not even the same colour, as the wolves are: some of us are black, some are grey, some are red with white-spotted chests, and some of us are white all over. How can I lead troops who are so lacking in unity to fight against an enemy who all resemble each other in every possible way?'

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: 'Unity is mankind's greatest good, while dissension is a weak and slavish thing.' Molossians and the other dogs listed here were

breeds who took their name from their place of origin (like German shepherds, Rhodesian ridgebacks, etc. today).

Fable 61 (Chambry 203 = Perry 338)

The Lion and the Boar at the Spring

In summertime, when the heat makes everyone thirsty, a lion and a wild boar had come to drink from the same small spring. They began to argue about who was going to take the first drink, and their argument escalated into a duel to the death. When they momentarily paused to catch their breath, the lion and the boar saw that vultures were waiting to snatch and devour the one who was killed. At that point, the lion and the boar put their hatred aside and said, 'It is better for us to befriend one another than to be eaten by vultures and ravens!'

The story teaches us that it is good to set aside our deadly disputes and conflicts, since they put everyone's lives in jeopardy.

Fable 62 (Chambry 200* = Perry 147)

The Lion and the Bear

A lion and a bear had found a fawn and were fighting to see who would keep it. In the protracted violence of the battle they had both grown faint from fighting, so they called a truce in order to rest. Meanwhile, there was a fox who had been pacing around them in circles. When she saw that they had fallen to the ground with the fawn lying between them, she dashed up, grabbed the fawn, and

took off at a run. The lion and the bear were not even able to get to their feet, so they sat there watching the fox disappear. ‘What fools we are,’ they said, ‘for having gone to so much trouble on that fox’s behalf!’

The fable shows that while some people do all the work, others make off with the profit.

NOTE: L’Estrange’s epimythium associates this fable with the land of Gotham, the traditional abode of fools: ‘’Tis the Fate of all Gotham Quarrels, when Fools go together by the Ears, to have Knaves run away with the Stakes.’

Fable 63 (Chambry 289 = Perry 197)

The Snake, the Weasel, and the Mice

A snake and a weasel were fighting with one another inside a house. The mice who lived in the house were always being hunted down by either the snake or the weasel, so when they saw the snake and the weasel fighting with each other, they emerged from their holes and scurried around. When the weasel and the snake saw what was happening, they stopped fighting with each other and turned their attention to the mice.

The same is true in a city: if you recklessly get involved in a political dispute, you will become an incidental casualty of the quarrel.

NOTE: The Greeks and Romans used weasels (not cats) to keep their houses free of vermin.

Fable 64 (Chambry 272 = Perry 263)

The Donkey and the Mule

A donkey and a mule were walking along together. When the donkey saw that they were carrying equal loads, he got angry and complained that the mule was awarded a double portion of food even though she carried a load that was no bigger than his own. After they had journeyed a little further down the road, the driver saw that the donkey could not hold up under the weight, so he took part of the donkey's load and placed it on the mule. Later, when the driver saw that the donkey had grown even more tired, he again transferred some of the donkey's load to the mule, and so on. Finally the driver took the entire load and shifted it from the donkey to the mule. At that point the mule glanced over at the donkey and said, 'What do you say now: don't I deserve a double portion of food?'

It is the same when we pass judgement on one another's situations: instead of looking at how things start, we should look instead at how they turn out in the end.

Fable 65 (Ademar 34 = Perry 181)

The Donkey and the Ox

A donkey and an ox had been yoked together to pull a single load. The ox was making a great effort, even though he had an injury to his horn, while the donkey was doing nothing to help. As the ox struggled to pull the load by himself, he soon died. The driver then loaded the ox's carcass upon the donkey and began beating him

mercilessly. The donkey broke down and collapsed under the weight, dropping dead in the middle of the road. A flock of birds flew up and alighted on the donkey's carcass. 'If only you had been kind enough to help the ox pull the load,' they said, 'you would not have died this untimely death, with carrion birds feasting on your flesh.'

NOTE: The Greek versions of this fable are about a horse and a donkey (e.g. Chambry 141), and there is also a version about an ox and a camel (Plutarch, *Preservation of Health* 27).

Fable 66 (Livy, *History* 2.32.9 = Perry 130)

The Stomach and the Body

Back when all the parts of the human body did not function in unison as is the case today, each member of the body had its own opinion and was able to speak. The various members were offended that everything won by their hard work and diligent efforts was delivered to the stomach while he simply sat there in their midst, fully at ease and just enjoying the delights that were brought to him. Finally, the members of the body revolted: the hands refused to bring food to the mouth, the mouth refused to take in any food, and the teeth refused to chew anything. In their angry effort to subdue the stomach with hunger, the various parts of the body and the whole body itself completely wasted away. As a result, they realized that the work done by the stomach was no small matter, and that the food he consumed was no more than what he gave back to all

the parts of the body in the form of blood which allows us to flourish and thrive, since the stomach enriches the blood with digested food and then distributes it equally throughout the veins.

NOTE: In Plutarch, *Life of Coriolanus* 6, the stomach puts a stop to the foolish body parts by laughing at them. There is nothing funny about the medieval Latin versions of the fable, in which the protest reaches its logical conclusion and the entire body dies of hunger. This story is perhaps best-known from the version found in the opening scene of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*.

Fable 67 (Babrius 128 = Perry 356)

The Sheep, the Shepherd, and the Dog

A sheep once said to the shepherd, 'You shear us and keep all the wool for yourself; you like to take our milk and make it into cheese; thanks to our children, your flocks flourish and prosper. Yet there is no profit for us in these things. Everything we eat comes from the ground—and what kind of blossom is there to be found on the mountain sides? The grass is dry even when covered with dew. Meanwhile, you nourish this dog in our midst, feeding her on the same kind of hearty food that you yourself eat!' When the dog heard this, she said, 'If it weren't for me protecting you on every side, you would not even manage to get enough grass to eat! By running all around you, I ward off the marauding thief and the prowling wolf.'

NOTE: There is a version of this fable in Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.7.

Fable 68 (Chambry 175* = Perry 92)

The Hunting-dog and the Watchdog

There was a man who had two dogs. He taught one to hunt and the other to be a watchdog. Whenever the hunting-dog caught something, the watchdog would also share in the spoils. This made the hunting-dog angry at the watchdog, since he had to work for everything he had while the watchdog lived off the fruits of his labour without doing anything. The watchdog retorted, 'Don't blame me! It's our master's fault. Since he didn't teach me how to work, I only know how to eat the food that others earn.'

This fable shows that the same is true of children: it is not their fault if they don't know how to do anything, since this is how their parents have raised them.

NOTE: A similar story is associated with the legendary Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus (in Plutarch, *Sayings of the Spartans*): Lycurgus took two dogs and raised them differently, one as a hunter and one as a house dog, in order to demonstrate the degree to which education determines excellence.

FABLES ABOUT FRIENDSHIP

Fable 69 (Ademar 35 = Perry 563)

The Shepherd and the Lion

While he was wandering in the fields, a lion got a thorn stuck in his paw. He immediately went to a shepherd, wagging his tail as he said, ‘Don’t be afraid! I have come to ask your help; I’m not looking for food.’ The lion then lifted his paw and placed it in the man’s lap. The shepherd pulled out the thorn from the lion’s paw and the lion went back into the woods. Later on, the shepherd was falsely accused of a crime and at the next public games he was released from jail and thrown to the beasts. As the wild animals rushed upon him from all sides, the lion recognized that this was the same man who had healed him. Once again the lion raised his paw and placed it in the shepherd’s lap. When the king understood what had happened, he commanded that the lion be spared and that the gentle shepherd be sent back home to his family.

When a man acts righteously, he can never be defeated by the punishments inflicted on him by his enemies.

NOTE: The most famous version of this story is found in Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 5.14, where the shepherd is named ‘Androcles’ (Latin ‘Androclus’). This is the only Aesopic fable that ever gave rise to a full-length Hollywood film: *Androcles and the Lion*, made in 1952 (based on a play of the same name by George Bernard Shaw).

Fable 70 (Ademar 18 = Perry 150)

The Lion and the Mouse

Some field-mice were playing in the woods where a lion was sleeping, when one of the mice accidentally ran over the lion. The lion woke up and immediately grabbed the wretched little mouse with his paw. The mouse begged for mercy, since he had not meant to do the lion any harm. The lion decided that to kill such a tiny creature would be a cause for reproach rather than glory, so he forgave the mouse and let him go. A few days later the lion fell into a pit and was trapped. He started to roar, and when the mouse heard him, he came running. Recognizing the lion in the trap, the mouse said to him, 'I have not forgotten the kindness that you showed me!' The mouse then began to gnaw at the cords binding the lion, cutting through the strands and undoing the clever ingenuity of the hunter's art. The mouse was thus able to restore the lion to the woods, setting him free from his captivity.

Let no one dare to harm even the smallest among us.

NOTE: For a quite different fable about a lion and a mouse, see Fable 245.

Fable 71 (Chambry 242* = Perry 235)

The Ant, the Pigeon, and the Bird-catcher

An ant was thirsty and went down to a spring expecting to take a drink of water, but instead he found himself in danger of drowning. A pigeon snapped off a leaf from a nearby tree and threw it to the ant so that he could save himself by climbing up onto the leaf.

Meanwhile, a bird-catcher showed up and prepared his limed reeds, intending to capture the pigeon. The ant then bit the bird-catcher on the foot, which caused him to shake his limed reeds, warning the pigeon, who flew off to safety.

The story shows that even dumb beasts experience fellow feeling and come to one another's aid.

> NOTE: For a more detailed description of the bird-catcher's use of a snare made of extensible reeds coated with viscous birdlime, see Fable 138.

Fable 72 (Aphthonius 28 = Perry 395)

The Snake, the Eagle, and the Farmer

A story about an eagle and a snake, exhorting us to be the first to grant a favour.

A snake and an eagle were grappling with one another as they fought. The snake had tightened his hold on the eagle when a farmer saw them and freed the eagle from the grip of the snake. The snake was angry about what had happened, so he went and poisoned the man's drinking water. But just as the unsuspecting farmer was about to take a drink, the eagle flew down and snatched the cup out of his hands.

The man who treats others well is rewarded by gratitude.

NOTE: There is an elaborate version of this story in Aelian, *Characteristics of Animals* 17.37.

Fable 73 (Chambry 79* = Perry 296)

The Eagle and the Farmer

An eagle was caught by a farmer, but the farmer let him go when he realized what he had caught. The eagle did not forget this good deed, and when he saw the farmer sitting under a wall that was on the verge of collapsing, he snatched the bandana from the man's head, wanting to rouse the man from his seat and make him stand up. After the man set off in pursuit, the kindly eagle dropped what he had snatched and thus fully repaid the man's good deed: the man would have been crushed by the wall's collapse if he had stayed there any longer. After a while the man came back to where he had been sitting and found that the upright section of the wall had fallen to the ground.

This fable shows that if anyone does you a favour you must repay them in kind.

NOTE: In Cicero, *On Divination* 1.15, the same story is reported as actually having happened to Deiotarus (d. 40 BCE), a Galatian monarch and ally of the Romans. For a similar legend attributed to the prophet Mohammed, see Rumi, *Mathnawi* 3.3233 ff.

Fable 74 (Ademar 65 = Perry 573)

The Snake and the Farmer

In the house of a certain farmer there lived a snake who regularly came to the table and was fed on scraps of food. Not long afterwards the farmer grew rich, but then he became angry at the snake and tried to attack him with an axe. The farmer then lost his wealth and he realized that he had prospered because of the good luck he had gained from the snake before having wounded him. The farmer then begged the snake to forgive him for his evil deed, and the snake replied, 'You are sorry for what you have done, but you must not expect me to be your faithful friend until this scar heals. It is not possible for me to be truly reconciled to you until all thought of that treacherous axe has left my mind.'

The person who injures anyone at any time must be treated with suspicion, which is a serious obstacle to the restoration of affection among friends.

> NOTE: For a more elaborate version of this same story, see Fable 75 (following).

Fable 75 (Chambry 81* = Perry 51)

The Snake and the Farmer

There was a snake who used to lurk around the front door of a farmer's house. One day the snake struck the man's son, biting him on the foot. The boy died on the spot. The boy's parents were filled with immense sorrow and the grief-stricken father seized his axe

and tried to kill the malevolent snake. When the snake fled from his pursuer, the man hurried after him, raising his weapon, determined to strike, but as the farmer was about to deal the snake a deadly blow, he missed and managed only to cut off the tip of his tail. The man was terrified at the thought that he might have killed the snake, so he took cakes and water along with honey and salt and called to the snake, wanting to make peace with him. The snake, however, only hissed softly at the farmer from where he had hidden himself in the rocks and said: 'Man, do not trouble yourself any longer: there can be no possible friendship between us any more. When I look upon my tail, I am in pain. The same is true for you: whenever you look again upon the grave of your son, you will not be able to live in peace with me.'

The fable shows that no one can put aside thoughts of hatred or revenge so long as he sees a reminder of the pain that he suffered.

NOTE: There is an even more detailed explanation of the story's motivation in an Indian version of the same fable in Book 3 of the *Panchatantra*: when the man's son realizes that the snake is able to bestow wealth, he becomes greedy and decides to kill the snake in order to take all the snake's treasure, but instead the snake kills him.

FABLES ABOUT GRATITUDE AND INGRATITUDE

Fable 76 (Phaedrus 3.2 = Perry 494)

The Panther and the People

People who have been treated with contempt repay the deed in kind.

A panther foolishly happened to have fallen into a pit. The local villagers saw her there and some of them attacked her with sticks or pelted her with stones. There were others who felt sorry for the creature since she seemed sure to die even though she had not done any harm, so they brought her bread to keep up her strength. Night fell and everyone went home, confident that they would find the panther dead when the next day dawned. However, as soon as she recovered from her weakness and regained her strength, the panther escaped from the pit with a mighty leap and hurried quickly home to her den. A few days later she descended upon the village, slaughtering the sheep and even killing the shepherds as she laid waste to everything around her in a furious attack of rage. At this point even the people who had shown mercy to the beast began to fear what lay in store for them. Without a word about the damage that the panther had wrought, they begged her just to spare their lives. The panther then said, 'I am well aware of who pelted me with stones and who gave me bread, so put aside your fears. I have returned as an enemy only to those who wanted to hurt me.'

Fable 77 (Syntipas 34 = Perry 120)

The Dog and the Gardener

A gardener had a dog who had fallen into a well. The gardener lowered himself into the well to pull the dog out, but the dog only

gave the man a nasty bite, thinking that the man intended to plunge him even deeper into the water. After the dog had bitten him, the gardener said, ‘It serves me right for making such an effort to pull you out of the well, when all you can do is attack me.’

This fable indicts people who are foolish and ungrateful.

Fable 78 (Chambry 316* = Perry 208)

The Sheep, the Shepherd, and His Cloak

A shepherd had driven his sheep into a stand of oaks. He then spread his cloak under an oak tree and climbed up into the tree in order to shake the acorns down. As the sheep ate the acorns, they also ate the shepherd’s cloak, unbeknownst to the shepherd. The shepherd then climbed down from the tree, and when he saw what had happened he said, ‘Oh you wicked creatures! You give wool to other people so that they can make clothes but you take my clothes and ruin them, even though I am the one who feeds you!’

The fable shows that people frequently do favours for someone who has nothing to do with them, while treating their own family members unkindly.

Fable 79 (Chambry 235* = Perry 72)

The Bees and the Beekeeper

A thief got into a beekeeper’s property when its owner was away and stole the honeycombs. When the owner came back and saw that the beehives were empty, he stood there puzzling over what had

happened. The bees then came back from their pastures, and when they found the beekeeper there they attacked him fiercely with their stings. The beekeeper said to the bees, ‘You wretched creatures! You let the man who stole your honeycombs get away with impunity while you direct your rage at me, the very person who takes care of you!’

So too there are people who foolishly leave themselves unprotected against their enemies and push their friends away as if those friends were plotting against them.

Fable 80 (Chambry 103* = Perry 77)

The Deer and the Vine

A deer who was being pursued by hunters hid under a grapevine. When the hunters had passed by, she turned her head and began to eat the leaves of the vine. One of the hunters came back, and when he saw the deer he hurled his javelin and struck her. As she was dying, the deer groaned to herself, ‘It serves me right, since I injured the vine that saved me!’

This fable can used against people who are punished by God for having harmed their benefactors.

NOTE: For a story about the goat and the vine, see Fable 157.

Fable 81 (Chambry 152* = Perry 250)

The Nut Tree and the People

There was a nut tree standing by the side of the road which had a great many nuts, and the people walking along the road used to knock them off by throwing sticks and stones at the tree. The nut tree then said sadly, ‘Woe is me! People gladly enjoy my fruits, but they have a terrible way of showing their gratitude.’

The fable indicts those ungrateful and wicked people who requite good deeds with cruelty.

NOTE: The moral in Alciato, *Emblems* 193, is somewhat different: the nut tree laments that the fruit she produces is the cause of her own suffering.

Fable 82 (Chambry 257 = Perry 175)

The Travellers and the Plane Tree

Around noon on a summer’s day, some travellers who were exhausted by the heat caught sight of a plane tree. They went and lay down in the shade of the tree in order to rest. Looking up at the tree, they remarked to one another that the plane tree produced no fruit and was therefore useless to mankind. The plane tree interrupted them and said, ‘What ungrateful people you are! You denounce my uselessness and lack of fruit at the very moment in which you are enjoying my kindness!’

Likewise, even when a person treats his neighbours well, his goodness can unfortunately be called into question.

NOTE: In order to express the lack of gratitude shown to him by the Athenians, the great general Themistocles (d. 460 BCE) compared himself to a plane tree whose good services were not appreciated (Plutarch, *Life of Themistocles* 18).

Fable 83 (Chambry 6* = Perry 275)

The Two Men, the Eagle, and the Fox

An eagle was once caught by a man who immediately clipped his wings and turned him loose in the house with the chickens. The eagle was utterly dejected and grief-stricken. Another man bought the eagle and restored the eagle's feathers. The eagle then soared on his outspread wings and seized a hare, which he promptly brought back as a gift for the man who had rescued him. A fox saw what the eagle was doing and shouted, 'He's not the one who needs your attention! You should give the hare to the first man, so that if he ever catches you again, he won't deprive you of your wing feathers like the first time.'

The fable shows that we should give appropriate thanks to our benefactors, while avoiding evil-doers.

NOTE: The moral added to this fable flatly contradicts the moral inside the fable pronounced by the fox. The fox is pragmatic: give the reward to the wicked man in order to win his favour. The editor of the fable prefers a more pious rule of behaviour: good deeds, not wickedness, should be rewarded.

Fable 84 (Syntipas 45 = Perry 401)

The Man, the Mare, and the Foal

A man was riding a pregnant mare and she gave birth to her foal while they were still on the road. The newborn foal followed directly behind his mother but soon became unsteady on his feet. The foal then said to the man, 'Look, you can see that I am very small and not strong enough to travel. If you leave me here, I am sure to die. But if you carry me away from here back to your home and bring me up, then later on, when I am grown, I shall let you ride me.'

The fable shows that we should do favours for someone who can do us a good deed in return.

Fable 85 (Chambry 98 = Perry 247)

Diogenes and the Ferryman

On his travels, Diogenes the Cynic came to a stream that was flooded. He stood on the bank, unable to go any farther. One of those ferrymen who regularly carry people across rivers saw that Diogenes did not know what to do, so he approached the philosopher, picked him up, and kindly carried him across the water. Diogenes then stood on the opposite shore, bewailing the poverty that prevented him from rewarding the man for his good deed. While Diogenes was still pondering this state of affairs, the ferryman saw another traveller who could not get across, so he hurried off to offer his assistance. Diogenes accosted the ferryman

and said, ‘Well, I do not feel in your debt any longer for the favour that you did me. This is not an act of judgement on your part—it’s an addiction!’

The story shows that someone who assists both the truly good and those who are undeserving is not seen as a philanthropist, but is instead regarded as a madman.

NOTE: Diogenes the Cynic was a Greek mendicant philosopher of the fourth century BCE. For another anecdote about Diogenes, see Fable 580.

FABLES ABOUT FALSE FRIENDS

Fable 86 (Babrius 130 = Perry 345)

The Wolf, the Fox, and the Gift

A fox was standing not far from a trap, pondering every possible approach. A nearby wolf noticed the fox and approached her. He then asked the fox if he might be allowed to take the meat, and the fox replied, ‘Go ahead and help yourself! You’re welcome to it, seeing as you are one of my very dearest friends.’ The wolf rushed up without a moment’s hesitation, and as he learned forward over the trap he released the trigger so that the rod sprang free, striking his snout and forehead. ‘If this is the sort of gift you give you to your friends,’ said the wolf, ‘why would anyone ever want to be friends with you?’

NOTE: For a similar trick played by the fox on the monkey, see Fable 24.

Fable 87 (Chambry 283* = Perry 193)

The Bird-catcher and the Lark

A bird-catcher had set up his snare for the birds. A lark observed these preparations and asked the bird-catcher what he was doing. The man said to the lark that he was founding a city. The man then moved away from the snare. The bird, believing what the man had said, approached and ate some of the bait. Then, without realizing it, he was trapped in the snare. As the bird-catcher ran up and grabbed hold of the lark, the bird said to him, 'Look here, if this is the sort of city you are founding, you won't find many inhabitants for it!'

The story shows that households and cities are most likely to be deserted when there are harsh people in charge.

Fable 88 (Syntipas 21 = Perry 403)

The Dog-catcher and the Dog

A man saw a dog walking by and threw him some bits of food. The dog then said to the man, 'O man, keep away from me! All your well-wishing warns me to be even more on my guard.'

This fable shows that people who offer to give someone many gifts are no doubt trying to deceive him.

NOTE: The man in this fable is called a ‘hunter’ (or perhaps a ‘thief’, as one editor has conjectured); he appears to be a kind of ‘dog thief’ or ‘dog-catcher’. In another version of the story (Phaedrus 1.23), the man is a thief throwing food to a watchdog.

Fable 89 (Odo 66 = Perry 621)

The Birds, the Peacock, and His Feathers

Against vanity and so on.

The peacock was a remarkable bird, both because of the beauty of his feathers with their various colours and also because he was gentle and courteous. On his way to the assembly of the birds, the peacock ran into the raven. The raven asked the peacock if he would give him two of his feathers. The peacock said, ‘What will you do for me in return?’ The raven replied, ‘I will squawk your praises throughout the courts in the presence of all the other birds!’ So the peacock gave the raven two of his feathers. The crow then made the same request of the peacock and obtained two of the peacock’s feathers, as did the cuckoo and all kinds of other birds, until finally the peacock was plucked completely bare. The peacock was supposed to nourish and protect his chicks but he was unable to do so since he didn’t have any feathers. Winter came, and he died. His chicks went away and lived as best as they could on their own.

NOTE: For a different sort of fable about the crow in borrowed feathers, see Fable 328.

Fable 90 (Syntipas 20 = Perry 305)

The Deer and Her Friends

A deer had fallen ill and was resting on the grassy plain. When the other animals came to see her, they ate up all the grass in her pasture. As a result, when the deer recovered from her illness, she ended up dying since her pasture had come to an end.

The fable shows that there is no benefit in having lots of foolish friends; in fact, it can be a disaster.

Fable 91 (Avianus 9 = Perry 65)

The Two Friends and the Bear

A man was travelling together with his friend along a narrow road through unknown mountains and winding valleys. He felt safe because he and his friend could combine forces to fight whatever danger Fortune might put in their way. As they were travelling along discussing various subjects, a bear suddenly confronted them in the middle of the road. One of the men ran straight for a tree and grabbed at a branch in order to suspend his trembling body in the foliage. The other man stood stock still and then fell to the ground on purpose, pretending to be dead. The wild beast immediately ran up to him, eager to seize her victim. With her curved bear claws, she lifted the wretched man up off the ground, but since his limbs had grown stiff and frozen with fear (for the usual warmth of life had left his body), the bear concluded that he was nothing but a rotting corpse. Thus, despite her hunger, the bear abandoned the

man and went away to her den. The men gradually began to relax and started up their conversation again. The man who had only just now fled in fear was feeling far too sure of himself and he said to his companion, ‘Tell me, my friend, what did that bear say to you while you were lying there shaking? She must have told you many things in that lengthy private conversation.’ The other man replied, ‘Indeed, she gave me some quite important advice including, alas, one particular command that I cannot afford to forget: “Do not be too quick to resume your fellowship with that other man, in case you fall once again into the clutches of another wild beast.”’

Fable 92 (Phaedrus 5.2 = Perry 524)

The Two Soldiers and the Robber

Two soldiers happened to fall into the clutches of a robber: one of the soldiers ran away while the other stood his ground and defended himself with all the strength he could muster. As soon as the robber had been beaten back, the soldier’s cowardly companion ran up, drawing his sword and even throwing aside his cloak as he said, ‘Let me at him; I will make sure he knows who it is he has dared to attack!’ The one who had fought with the robber replied, ‘I only wish that you had been here to help me with your words; even if you did nothing more than that, I would have believed what you were saying and would have fought with even greater determination. But please put away your sword and shut your useless mouth: you might be able to fool people who do not know

you, but I have learned by experience with what prowess you turn tail and run, and how unreliable your courage really is.'

This tale should be applied to a man who is confident when things are going well but who proves a coward when the outcome is in doubt.

Fable 93 (Chambry 256* = Perry 67)

The Travellers and the Axe

Two men were walking down the same road together when one of them found an axe. 'Eureka!' he cried, 'I found it!' The one who didn't find the axe said to him, 'Don't say "I found it"—say "we found it" instead.' A little while later the people who had lost the axe caught up with them, and when they started to chase the man who was holding the axe, he said to his fellow traveller, 'We are lost!' The fellow traveller answered, 'Incorrect! You should say "I am lost," not "we are lost," since when you found the axe you said "I" found it, not "we" found it.'

The story shows that if people are not allowed to share in your good fortune, they will not stand by you in times of trouble.

Fable 94 (Phaedrus 3.9 = Perry 500)

Socrates and His Friends

The word 'friend' is in common use but true friends are hard to find.

Socrates had erected for himself a very modest house—and I myself would even be willing to die as Socrates died if I could achieve an

equal fame, yes, I would be willing to suffer the same public disapproval if I too could be vindicated after death! Anyway, just as you would expect on such an occasion, one of his neighbours had to ask, 'Why is it, Socrates, that someone like you would build himself such a tiny little house?' 'Ah,' said Socrates, 'if only I could fill it with true friends!'

NOTE: The Greek philosopher Socrates was executed by the state of Athens in 399 BCE (see Fable 532 for a fable attributed to Socrates).

FABLES ABOUT DECEPTIVE INVITATIONS

Fable 95 (pseudo-Dositheus, *Hermeneumata* = Perry 389)

The Cat and the Birds

The cat pretended that it was his birthday and invited the birds to a party. When the birds had come in, the cat seized the opportunity: he shut the doors of his house and proceeded to devour the birds one after another.

This fable can be applied to people who set off with high hopes of something pleasant but who actually experience the exact opposite.

NOTE: The cat is replaced by a bird in other versions of the fable; see Fable 96 (following).

Fable 96 (Romulus 4.11 = Perry 577)

The Raven and the Birds

The raven pretended that it was his birthday and invited the birds to a party. Once the birds were inside, he locked the door and began to kill them one by one.

This fable is meant for people who rush off to some merry feast but who find that things are the opposite of what they expected.

> NOTE: In other medieval versions of this fable it is a vulture or a hawk who throws the party.

Fable 97 (Phaedrus 3.16 = Perry 507)

The Cricket and the Owl

Someone who does not respect his associates will usually be punished for his conceited behaviour.

The cricket was making a great deal of noise and this greatly annoyed the owl, since she was accustomed to seek out her food in the darkness of night and to sleep during the day inside the hollowed-out branch of a tree. The owl thus asked the cricket to keep quiet, which only provoked the cricket to make an even greater racket. Again the owl asked the cricket to keep quiet, and this triggered a still greater outburst of noise. When the owl saw that she was accomplishing nothing since the cricket simply scorned her requests, she decided to trick the chattering insect. ‘Given that I cannot sleep because of your singing,’ said the owl, ‘which of course one might easily mistake for the tuneful strains of Apollo’s lyre, I’ve

decided to drink some of the nectar which Athena recently gave me as a gift. Please come and let's drink it together, if that meets with your approval.' The cricket happened to be extremely thirsty and she was also quite pleased by the compliments which the owl had paid to her singing, so she gladly flew to where the owl was waiting. The owl then sealed up the entrance and seized the trembling cricket and brought her life to an end: what the cricket refused to do while living, she conceded in death.

NOTE: Apollo was the leader of the Muses and the god of music and poetry; Athena was the goddess of wisdom and warfare. The owl was closely associated with Athena.

Fable 98 (Ademar 25 = Perry 561)

The Night-owl, the Cat, and the Mouse

A night-owl asked a cat if the cat would agree to carry him around, so that together they could go and look for someone to talk to. The cat took the owl to the house of a mouse. The owl asked the cat to announce him and he did so. When the mouse heard the voice of the cat, he came to the door of his house and said, 'What do you two want from me? What do you have to say?' 'We want to talk with you', said the owl and the cat. The mouse understood that these two had devised some evil plot against him, so he replied, 'A curse on you, my lord cat, and a curse on the one you are carrying—and a curse on your house, and on your sons and your daughters, and on

all your damn relatives! You did badly to come here, and I hope that bad things will befall you on your way back home!'

For people who do not know how to speak nicely to their enemies, thus creating enmity and getting into trouble.

Fable 99 (Babrius 97 = Perry 143)

The Bull, the Lion, and the Dinner Invitation

There was once a lion who wanted to set a trap for a wild bull. He pretended to be making a sacrifice to the mother of the gods and asked the bull to come share the feast. The bull said that he would come, suspecting nothing. But when he arrived and stood in the lion's door, he looked and saw many bronze cooking pots filled with boiling water, along with cleavers and knives for skinning, all newly polished. Yet the bull didn't see anything that could be offered for sacrifice except a single trussed-up rooster. The bull then turned tail and ran back to the mountains. Later on the lion happened to run into the bull and criticized his behaviour. The bull said, 'I came to your house, and here's the proof that I was there: you had no sacrificial victim on hand that was equal to the scale of your butcher shop.'

Fable 100 (Syntipas 44 = Perry 157)

The Wolf and the Goat on the Cliff

There was a goat grazing up high on a cliff. At the bottom of the cliff there was a wolf who wanted to catch the goat and eat her.

Since it was impossible for the wolf to climb up the cliff, he stood down below and said to the goat, ‘You poor creature! Why have you left the level plains and meadows in order to graze upon the cliff? Are you trying to tempt death from that height?’ The goat said to the wolf in response, ‘I know how often I have managed to frustrate you! What makes you think that you can now get me to come down off this cliff so that you can eat me for dinner?’

The fable shows that sometimes people give you advice that is to their advantage but which is dangerous for you.

NOTE: In another version of this fable (Avianus 26), the goat is besieged by a lion, not a wolf.

Fable 101 (Phaedrus *App.* 32 = Perry 557)

The Fox and the Ground-bird

There is a bird that country folk call ‘ground-bird’, which makes sense, because this bird makes her nest on the ground. A ground-bird happened to run into a conniving vixen, and as soon as she noticed her, the ground-bird flew even higher on her wings. ‘Greetings!’ said the vixen, ‘May I ask why you are running away? It’s not as if there were not plenty of food for me here in the field—grasshoppers, beetles, locusts in abundance—so there’s nothing for you to be afraid of. I am actually very fond of you because of your retiring manner and honest ways.’ The singing bird replied, ‘Your words are certainly pleasant to hear, but I am no equal to you on

the ground. Here in the air, though, I can hold my own. Why don't you come on up here with me? This is the place where I would trust you with my life!'

NOTE: Phaedrus has provided us with a folk name that is relevant to the fable, *terraneola* 'ground bird', but this name is not found in the ancient scientific writers, making it impossible to provide an identification.

Fable 102 (Phaedrus 1.25 = Perry 482)

The Dogs and the Crocodiles

If you try to deceive someone who has his wits about him, you will waste your time and be made fun of as well.

Legend has it that when dogs drink from the Nile they do so on the run to avoid being caught by the crocodiles. So when a certain dog started to lap some water as he ran, a crocodile said, 'Drink as much as you want, take your time, don't be afraid!' The dog then said to the crocodile, 'By god, I would do just that, if I didn't already know that you have a craving for my flesh!'

NOTE: This same motif is found in Pliny, *Natural History* 8.61: 'when they lap from the Nile they do so at a run, so that they won't give the hungry crocodiles a chance to eat them.'

Fable 103 (Babrius 132 = Perry 261)

The Wolf and the Sheep in the Sheepfold

A solitary sheep suddenly caught sight of a wolf and fled into the sheepfold, which by chance had been left open since a sacrifice was being readied for the holiday. The wolf did not come within the walls of the sheepfold but stood outside and tried to win the sheep's trust. 'Don't you see that altar there covered with blood?' said the wolf. 'Come out, or else they will seize you and sacrifice you too.' The sheep replied, 'Don't you worry about my place of refuge; I'm doing just fine. And even if things turn out as you say, I would rather become an offering for the god than a meal for a wolf!'

FABLES ABOUT FLATTERY AND INSULTS

Fable 104 (Aphthonius 29 = Perry 124)

The Fox and the Raven

A story about a fox and a raven which urges us not to trust anyone who is trying to deceive us.

The raven seized a piece of cheese and carried his spoils up to his perch high in a tree. A fox came up and walked in circles around the raven, planning a trick. 'What is this?' cried the fox. 'O raven, the elegant proportions of your body are remarkable, and you have a complexion that is worthy of the king of the birds! If only you had a voice to match, then you would be first among the fowl!' The fox said these things to trick the raven and the raven fell for it: he let out a great squawk and dropped his cheese. By thus showing off his voice, the raven let go of his spoils. The fox then grabbed the cheese and said, 'O raven, you do have a voice, but no brains to go with it!'

If you follow your enemies' advice, you will get hurt.

NOTE: Horace alludes to this fable in *Epistles*, 1.17.50f. For a similar story about the flattering fox but with a quite different outcome, see Fable 148.

Fable 105 (Odo 71)

The Cat and the Stork

We should strive to be like the stork who was carrying home an eel as food for herself and her chicks.

The cat saw a stork carrying an eel. Now, the cat is a creature who dearly loves fish although he doesn't like to get his feet wet. So the cat said to the stork, 'O most beautiful bird! You have such a red beak and such white feathers! Could it be that your beak is just as red on the inside as it is on the outside?' The stork refused to answer the cat, keeping her mouth shut so that she wouldn't lose her eel. The angry mouser then began insulting the stork, 'Why, you must be deaf or dumb! Why don't you answer me, you wretched creature? You do eat snakes sometimes, don't you? Snakes are poisonous and filthy! A nice animal likes to eat nice things, but you like to eat filthy things that are not nice at all! That means you are the most filthy bird in the world!' The stork didn't say anything, and just kept on walking, carrying her eel.

Fable 106 (Nikephoros Basilakis, in Walz, *Rhetores Graeci* = Perry 469)

The Lion, the Bull, and His Horns

A lion once saw a bull and, although he was extremely hungry, he feared being gored by the bull's horns. The lion had found the remedy for his disease, but could not administer the cure. Hunger eventually won out, and prompted him to grapple with the bull. Still, the size of the bull's horns deterred him. Finally he heeded his hunger, pretended to be friends, and prepared to trick the bull (when trouble is at hand, even valour quails; if it sees a risk in attempting to prevail by force, subterfuge is used). 'I commend your strength,' said the lion, 'and how I admire your beauty—your head, your whole physique! And what wonderful feet and hooves! But what a heavy burden you carry on your head! Take that useless contraption off! Your head will look better without it, and you will be free of the weight—the change will be altogether an improvement. Why do you need horns when you live at peace with the lion?' The bull was convinced. But as soon as he put aside the strength of his armour he was easy prey for the lion who dined without fear.

Believing your enemies makes you fall victim to their tricks and gets you into trouble.

Fable 107 (Chambry 335 = Perry 241)

The Cicada and the Fox

A cicada was singing on top of a tall tree. The fox wanted to eat the cicada, so she came up with a trick. She stood in front of the tree

and marvelled at the cicada's beautiful song. The fox then asked the cicada to come down and show himself, since the fox wanted to see how such a tiny creature could be endowed with such a sonorous voice. But the cicada saw through the fox's trick. He tore a leaf from the tree and let it fall to the ground. Thinking it was the cicada, the fox pounced and the cicada then said, 'Hey, you must be crazy to think I would come down from here! I've been on my guard against foxes ever since I saw the wings of a cicada in the spoor of a fox.'

The fable shows that a discerning person is made wise by the misfortunes of his neighbours.

Fable 108 (Ademar 51 = Perry 569)

The Monkeys and the Two Men

There were two men travelling together: one was a liar and the other always told the truth. Their journey led them to the land of the monkeys. There was a whole crowd of monkeys there and one of them noticed the travellers. The monkey who was clearly their leader ordered that the men be detained. Since he wanted to know what the men thought of him, he commanded all the rest of the monkeys to stand before him in a long line to his right and to his left, while a seat was prepared for him to sit on (this monkey had once seen the emperor, so he was ordering his monkeys to line up for him in the same way). The men were then told to come forward into the midst of the monkeys. The chief monkey said, 'Who am I?' The liar said, 'You are the emperor!' Then the monkey asked, 'And

those whom you see standing before me: who are they?' The man answered, 'They are your noble companions, your chancellors, your officials, and the commanders of your armies!' Because these lies flattered the monkey and his troops, he ordered that the man be showered with presents. All the monkeys were fooled by his flattery. Meanwhile, the man who always told the truth thought to himself, 'If that liar received such rewards for telling lies, then surely I will receive an even greater reward for telling the truth.' The chief monkey said to the second man, 'Now you tell me who I am, and who are these whom you see standing before me.' And the man who always loved the truth and never lied said to the monkey, 'You are simply a monkey, and all of these similar simians are monkeys as well!' The chief monkey immediately ordered the monkeys to attack the man with their teeth and claws because he had spoken the truth.

For wicked people who love to tell lies and to make trouble, attacking honesty and truth.

Fable 109 (Babrius 53 = Perry 159)

The Wolf, the Fox, and Three True Things

A wretched fox had fallen into the clutches of a wolf. She begged the wolf to spare her life and not to kill her, old as she was. The wolf said, 'By Pan, I will let you live if you tell me three true things.' The fox said, 'First, I wish that we had never met! Second, I wish you had been blind when we did meet! Third, and last of all, I hope that you do not live out this year, so that we will never meet again!'

NOTE: The wolf swears by Pan, a Greek god of the forests and hills. Other versions of this story (e.g. Chambry 230) are about a wolf and a sheep, not a fox.

FABLES ABOUT FALSE PROMISES AND LIES

Fable 110 (John of Sheppey 13 = Perry 645)

The Lion and the Unicorn

One day the lion pretended to be sick and went limping up to the unicorn, his chief enemy. He greeted the unicorn and said to him, 'Let us put aside all that we have done in the past, because I am no longer able to harm anyone at all. As you can see, I am old and suffering from various ailments. But before I die, I would very much like to speak with my wife who is out in the desert. So, kind sir, if I might be so bold, I would like to borrow your horn to use as a walking stick on my journey since it is just the right length and very sturdy. I promise to return it to you as soon as I reach my wife; I give you my word.' The unicorn believed the lion and pitied his feigned distress, so he loaned the lion his horn and was thus left defenceless. The lion then inflicted a serious wound on the unicorn and laid him low. The unicorn said, 'You are guilty not so much of cruelty as of treachery, since you repaid my favour with wickedness and betrayed the promise you made me.' The lion said, 'You fool, don't you know the saying:

> The man who prolongs his enemy's life
> Takes something from his own; clemency does not entail
> Showing mercy to one's enemies.'

The unicorn replied, 'You traitor, don't you know that in the same book it is written:

> Let the victory which we contrive by the sword
> Be an honourable victory or no victory at all;
> Let not posterity read that I won by guile; no perfidy
> Should obscure my triumph.'

Therefore, as we read in Ecclesiasticus 12: Do not ever trust your enemy. Always protect yourself from him, even if he comes to you humble and supplicating. The truth of this is plain to see.

NOTE: The lion and unicorn are quoting from the twelfth-century Latin poet Walter of Chatillon, *Alexandreis* 2.471–3 and 4.361–6. John of Sheppey was the Bishop of Rochester (d. 1360).

Fable 111 (Phaedrus 2.6 = Perry 490)

The Eagle and the Crow

No one is sufficiently well armed against the high and the mighty, and if there is a malicious advisor involved as well, then whoever falls victim to their criminal forces will be destroyed.

An eagle carried a tortoise high up into the air but the tortoise's flesh was hidden inside a home of horn, tucked away safely inside

so no harm could come to it. A crow then arrived on the scene, and as she winged her way past the eagle she said, ‘Well now, you have grasped an excellent prize in your talons, but unless I show you what to do with it, its weight will exhaust you to no avail.’ When the eagle promised to share with the crow, the crow advised her to drop the hard shell from the starry heights down onto the rocks. After the shell had been shattered, the tortoise’s meat would be easily consumed. The eagle was persuaded by the crow’s clever counsel and carried out the plan, generously sharing the feast with her teacher. Thus even something protected by a gift of nature was no match for these two, and the tortoise died a pitiful death.

NOTE: This mutual co-operation between the crow and the eagle seems to be Phaedrus’ own particular interpretation on the traditional tale; for the treachery which is more typical of Aesop’s fables, see Fable 112 (following).

Fable 112 (Romulus Ang. *cunctis* 13 = Perry 490)

The Eagle and the Crow

The eagle was strolling beside the sea one day, intending to go fishing. She didn’t catch any fish, but she did come across a shell, and inside the shell was a tortoise. She snatched the tortoise up in her talons and flew to a beach, where she planned to feast on her catch, turning the tortoise to good use by dint of her own efforts. But when the eagle went to eat the tortoise, the shell protected the tortoise from her talons and beak. Although the eagle struggled with

the shell for some time, her efforts were in vain: she couldn't get at the tortoise no matter how hard she tried. A crow then happened along and saw the eagle hopelessly trying to open the shell. The eagle was on the verge of giving up when the crow approached her and said, 'That is food fit for a king. By no means should it be tossed away!' 'Alas,' said the eagle, 'the container which holds it cannot be breached, as you see; the sides are all smooth, and my efforts are going to waste.' The crow then said to the eagle, 'If you will agree to divide the spoils with me, I will show you the way to open it up.' 'Tell me how!' said the eagle, 'then you and I will enjoy this feast together.' The tricky crow said, 'What you must do is fly up high in the sky. Then, when you find yourself far above some rocky shore, release the container from the grip of your talons so that it falls through the air and strikes against the rocks. The shell will be forced open, no longer protecting the tortoise inside, and you will be able to satisfy all your desires.' The eagle agreed and, following the crow's instructions, she flew up in the air and let the tortoise drop from her talons. Below, the crow was there waiting for the tortoise to fall. As soon as the tortoise reached the ground, the crow snatched it for herself and thus deceived the hungry eagle.

The moral: In this may, tricksters can deceive people who are unsuspecting, and by means of these tricks they are able to accomplish what brute force cannot do.

NOTE: L'Estrange provides a pointed epimythium: 'Charity begins at home, they say; and most People are kind to their Neighbours

for their own sakes.’

Fable 113 (Phaedrus 4.9 = Perry 9)

The Fox and the Goat in the Well

As soon as someone clever gets into trouble, he tries to find a way out at someone else’s expense.

A fox had unwittingly fallen down a well and found herself trapped inside its high walls. Meanwhile, a thirsty goat had made his way to that same place and asked the fox whether the water was fresh and plentiful. The fox set about laying her trap. ‘Come down, my friend,’ said the fox. ‘The water is so good that I cannot get enough of it myself!’ The bearded billy-goat lowered himself into the well, whereupon that little vixen leaped up on his lofty horns and emerged from the hole, leaving the goat stuck inside the watery prison.

NOTE: Caxton (6.3) provides a delightful rebuke of the goat by the fox: ‘And thenne the foxe beganne to lawhe and to scorne. hym | and sayd to hym | O mayster goote | yf thow haddest be wel wyse with thy fayre berde | or euer thow haddest entryd in to the welle | thow sholdest fyrst haue taken hede | how thow sholdest haue comen oute of hit ageyne.’

Fable 114 (Ademar 58 = Perry 571)

The Donkey, the Horse, and the Barley

A donkey asked a horse to give him a nibble of barley. The horse replied, ‘If only I could, I would do so gladly! Indeed, I would give you a great deal of barley, since I am a noble and generous character. When we return to the stable together this evening, I promise to give you an entire sack of grain.’ The donkey then said to the horse, ‘If you refuse to do me even this small favour now, why should I expect a still bigger favour in the future?’

For people who make big promises while refusing even small requests: they are quick to promise but reluctant to give.

Fable 115 (Chambry 149* = Perry 84)

The Two Dung Beetles

There was a bull who was pastured on a little island. Two dung beetles lived there too, feeding on the bull’s manure. Winter was approaching, so one of the dung beetles said to the other, ‘I want to go to the mainland and I will live there by myself during the winter. If I happen to find a good feeding ground over there, I will bring back something for you too.’ The beetle then moved to the mainland and found a lot of manure that was all moist and fresh. He settled in and had plenty to eat. When winter was over, he flew back to the little island where he had left the first beetle. When the first beetle saw that the second beetle was coming back looking so plump and fat, he asked him why he had not done what he had promised. The second beetle replied, ‘Don’t blame me! It’s the nature of the place: there is plenty to eat there, but the food cannot be taken away.’

This story fits those people who make displays of friendship at the height of the party, but who are otherwise useless to their friends.

Fable 116 (Phaedrus 1.19 = Perry 480)

The Mother Dog and Her Puppies

There is danger lurking in the words of a wicked person, which the following story warns us to avoid.

A dog who was about to give birth to puppies asked another dog if she could deliver the litter in her kennel. The owner of the kennel agreed. Later on, when the owner asked for her house back, the mother dog begged her to let her stay just a little while longer, until her puppies were strong enough to follow her. When this new deadline had passed, the owner of the kennel began to assert her claim more forcefully, but the mother dog retorted, 'If you think you are a match for me and all my brood, then come and get it!'

Fable 117 (Chambry 184* = Perry 134)

The Wolf and the Sleeping Dog

A dog was sleeping in front of the barn when a wolf noticed him lying there. The wolf was ready to devour the dog, but the dog begged the wolf to let him go for the time being. 'At the moment I am thin and scrawny,' said the dog, 'but my owners are about to celebrate a wedding, so if you let me go now, I'll get fattened up and you can make a meal of me later on.' The wolf trusted the dog and let him go. When he came back a few days later, he saw the dog

sleeping on the roof. The wolf shouted to the dog, reminding him of their agreement, but the dog simply said, ‘Wolf, if you ever catch me sleeping in front of the barn again, don’t wait for a wedding!’

The same is true of intelligent people: when they escape from some threatening situation, they are on guard in the future.

Fable 118 (Odo 56 = Perry 615)

The Cat, the Mouse, and the Oath

Against people who do not keep their promises.

There was once a mouse who had fallen into the foam of some fermenting wine or ale. A cat was passing by and heard the mouse squeaking because he couldn’t get out. The cat said, ‘Why are you making such a ruckus?’ The mouse answered, ‘Because I cannot get out of here.’ The cat said, ‘What will you give me if I get you out of there?’ The mouse said, ‘Whatever you want!’ The cat said, ‘If I set you free this time, will you come when I call you?’ The mouse replied, ‘You have my solemn promise.’ The cat said, ‘Swear an oath!’ So the mouse swore an oath. The cat then rescued the mouse and let him go. Then one day the cat was hungry. He went to the mouse’s hole and told him to come out. The mouse said, ‘I refuse.’ The cat said, ‘Didn’t you swear to me that you would come when I called you?’ The mouse said, ‘Brother, I was drunk when I swore that oath!’

NOTE: Like many of Odo's fables, this story has a monastic setting, and the mouse addresses the cat as 'brother', as if they were both monks; for another one of Odo's monastic stories, see Fable 119 (following).

Fable 119 (Odo 56a = Perry 696)

The Abbot and the Flea

Against people who do not keep their promises.

This is the story of the flea that was caught by the abbot. The abbot said, 'Now I've got you! You have bitten me many times, making it impossible for me to get a good night's sleep. I will never let you go; in fact, I am going to kill you right now!' The flea said, 'Holy Father, since you intend to kill me, please hold me in the palm of your hand so that I will be able to freely confess my sins to you. Let me make my confession, and then you can kill me.' The abbot was moved by the flea's piety so he placed the insect in the middle of his palm. The flea immediately leaped up into the air and flew away. The abbot yelled loudly at the flea, but he refused to come back.

FABLES WITHOUT MERCY

Fable 120 (Chambry 357 = Perry 272)

The Man and the Flea

A man finally caught a flea that had been bothering him terribly. He shouted at the flea, 'Just who do you think you are, feeding on all

the limbs of my body here and there, eating me up as you please?' The flea responded, 'That is how we live! Please don't kill me; I cannot be causing you too much harm.' The man laughed at the flea and said, 'I'm going to kill you here and now with my very own hands: any kind of evil, whether it is big or small, should not be allowed to exist under any circumstances whatsoever!'

The fable shows that no mercy should be granted to someone who is wicked, regardless of whether his wickedness is great or small.

Fable 121 (Avianus 39 = Perry 370)

The Soldier and the Trumpet

There was once a soldier, a weary veteran of many battles who had vowed to kindle a bonfire and consign his weapons to the flames, including all those weapons which many a dying man had surrendered to him in victory along with anything that he had been able to seize from the enemy forces as they fled the field. Since Fortune had favoured his wishes, the soldier was now about to carry out his vow, so he began casting the weapons one by one onto the burning pyre. The trumpet, however, protested loudly, denying his guilt and insisting that he was being sent undeservedly to the flames of the fire. 'You cannot claim that my powers were used to launch any missiles directed at your mighty arms', said the trumpet. 'All I did was to urge the weapons onward with my blast and my blare. Indeed, I swear by all the stars in heaven that I actually tried to blow as quietly as possible!' The soldier nevertheless added the

trumpet to the rest of the weapons. As the trumpet tossed and turned in the crackling flames, the soldier remarked, ‘All the more reason for you to suffer this pain and punishment! Although you did not actually accomplish anything on your own, you are all the more vicious on that account, since you urged others to do wicked deeds.’

Fable 122 (Chambry 158* = Perry 122)

The Rooster and the Thieves

Thieves broke into a certain house and didn’t find anything inside except a rooster. The thieves grabbed the rooster and made their escape. Later, when they were ready to kill him, the rooster begged the thieves to let him go, claiming that he was useful to people because he woke them to go about their tasks in the dark. The thieves said, ‘All the more reason to kill you: when you wake them up, you prevent us from robbing their houses!’

The story shows it is precisely the things that frustrate wicked people which are beneficial to honest folk,

> NOTE: L’Estrange’s epimythium cites the English proverb: ‘One Body’s Meat, is Another Body’s Poison.’

Fable 123 (Babrius 124 = Perry 361)

The Bird-catcher, the Partridge, and the Rooster

A bird-catcher received an unexpected visit from a friend just as he was about to dine on a simple meal of herbs and parsley. Since he

hadn't actually caught anything lately, the bird-cage was empty, so the man decided to slaughter a speckled partridge that he had tamed to use as a decoy. The partridge begged the bird-catcher not to kill him, 'My dear man, how will you hunt with your net in the future? Who will assemble that flock of gregarious, keen-eyed birds on your behalf? And who will serenade you with singing as you drift off to sleep?' The bird-catcher let go of the partridge, and decided to kill the bearded rooster instead. The rooster, however, let out a squawk from his perch and said, 'If you kill me, how will you know how much longer it is until dawn, since I am the one who tells you the time? How will you know that Orion with his golden bow is on watch during the night? Who will remind you of the morning's work, announcing the dew on the birds' outstretched wings?' The man said, 'It is useful indeed to know what time it is, but all the same, my friend has got to have something to eat!'

NOTE: The constellation Orion, one of the brightest stars in the night sky, was imagined by the Greeks to be a hunter armed with weapons, engaged in a perpetual battle with the constellation of Scorpio.

Fable 124 (Chambry 330* = Perry 215)

The Farmer, the Wasps, and the Partridges

There were once some wasps and some partridges who were terribly thirsty, so they went to a farmer to ask him for a drink. In return for the water, the partridges promised that they would dig around his

vines so that they would produce excellent grapes, while the wasps would stand guard over the vines, driving away thieves by stinging them. The farmer said to them, ‘But look, I have these two oxen, who do everything for me without making bargains. It is better for me to give the water to them, not to you.’

This fable is appropriate for a man who is ungrateful.

> NOTE: This elliptical epimythium seems to assume that this fable offers a positive example for a man who is not usually grateful (i.e., for a farmer who does not care for his oxen’s needs). In another version of this fable (included in Chambry’s first edition of the Greek fables), the moral focuses instead on the services offered by the wasps and the partridges: ‘This is a fable for noxious people who promise to be helpful but who are actually very harmful.’

Fable 125 (Chambry 241* = Perry 112)

The Ant and the Dung Beetle

During the summer, the ant went around the fields collecting grains of wheat and barley so that he could store up some food for the winter. A dung beetle watched the ant and decided that he must be a wretched creature since he worked all the time, never taking a moment’s rest, unlike the other animals. The ant didn’t pay attention to the dung beetle and simply went about his business. When winter came and the dung was washed away by the rain, the

beetle grew hungry. He went to the ant and begged him to share a little bit of his food. The ant replied, ‘O beetle, if you had done some work yourself instead of making fun of me while I was working so hard, then you would not need to be asking me for food.’

The fable teaches us that we should not neglect important things that require our attention, and instead we should attend in good time to our future well-being.

NOTE: For the more famous version of this story about the ant and the cricket, see Fable 126 (following).

Fable 126 (Syntipas 43 = Perry 373)

The Ant and the Cricket

During the wintertime, an ant was living off the grain that he had stored up for himself during the summer. The cricket came to the ant and asked him to share some of his grain. The ant said to the cricket, ‘And what were you doing all summer long, since you weren’t gathering grain to eat?’ The cricket replied, ‘Because I was busy singing I didn’t have time for the harvest.’ The ant laughed at the cricket’s reply, and hid his heaps of grain deeper in the ground. ‘Since you sang like a fool in the summer,’ said the ant, ‘you had better be prepared to dance the winter away!’

This fable depicts lazy, careless people who indulge in foolish pastimes, and therefore lose out.

NOTE: For a condemnation of the ant's foolish greed, see Fable 127 (following). For another negative interpretation of the ant's behaviour, see Fable 513, the story of the man who became an ant.

Fable 127 (Odo 42b)

The Ants and the Pigs

A fable against the vain accumulation of material goods.

Ants gather up a big pile of grain so that they can consume it during the winter, but at a certain point the pigs come along and they scatter the grain and eat it all up.

The same thing often happens to people: they gather much and often, but thieves come, or the bailiffs of the prince, or their own family members, and everything gets devoured, or else they end up leaving their wealth to strangers.

FABLES ABOUT TREACHERY AND WICKEDNESS

Fable 128 (Phaedrus 2.4 = Perry 488)

The Eagle, the Sow, and the Cat

An eagle had made her nest up high in an oak tree; meanwhile, in a hollow half-way up the tree, a cat had given birth to kittens; finally, at the foot of the tree there was a forest-dwelling sow and her litter of piglets. As it turned out, this fortuitous congregation was eventually destroyed by the cat's wicked and malicious scheming.

First, she went to the eagle's nest and said, 'You are about to be destroyed, and so am I! Woe is me! You can see for yourself how the treacherous sow keeps digging in the dirt day after day: she plans to uproot the tree so that she will be able to attack our offspring down there on the ground.' After having scared the eagle out of her wits with these words, the cat then crept down to the den of the bristly sow. 'Your litter is in grave danger,' said the cat, 'because the eagle is ready to seize your little piglets as soon as you go out to look for food.' Having filled the houses of both the eagle and the sow with terror, the sneaky creature hid herself safely inside her hollow in the tree. She crept out at night on tiptoe, finding plenty of food for herself and her kittens, but during the day she only poked her nose out of her den, pretending to be afraid. Meanwhile, the eagle didn't stir from the branches since she expected some disaster and the wild sow would not venture out of doors, since she wanted to protect her home from the eagle's attack. To make a long story short: the sow and the eagle both died of hunger, together with their children, thus supplying the cat and her kittens with a bountiful feast.

This fable is a lesson for foolish and gullible people, that someone who speaks with a forked tongue often stirs up all kinds of trouble.

Fable 129 (Chambry 12* = Perry 16)

The Cat and the Rooster

A cat had seized a rooster and wanted to find a reasonable pretext for devouring him. He began by accusing the rooster of bothering

people by crowing at night, making it impossible for them to sleep. The rooster said that this was actually an act of kindness on his part, since the people needed to be woken up in order to begin their day's work. The cat then made a second accusation, 'But you are also a sinner who violates nature's own laws when you mount your sisters and your mother.' The rooster said that this also was something he did for his master's benefit, since this resulted in a large supply of eggs. The cat found himself at a loss and said, 'Well, even if you have an endless supply of arguments, I am still going to eat you anyway!'

The fable shows that when someone with a wicked nature has set his mind on committing some offence, he will carry out his evil acts openly even if he cannot come up with a reasonable excuse.

NOTE: The cat's last words in L'Estrange are especially delightful: 'Come, come, says Puss, without any more ado, 'tis time for me to go to Breakfast, and Cats don't live upon Dialogues.'

Fable 130 (Babrius 89 = Perry 155)

The Wolf and the Lamb

A wolf once saw a lamb who had wandered away from the flock. He did not want to rush upon the lamb and seize him violently. Instead, he sought a reasonable complaint to justify his hatred. 'You insulted me last year, when you were small', said the wolf. The lamb replied, 'How could I have insulted you last year? I'm not even a year old.'

The wolf continued, ‘Well, are you not cropping the grass of this field which belongs to me?’ The lamb said, ‘No, I haven’t eaten any grass; I have not even begun to graze.’ Finally the wolf exclaimed, ‘But didn’t you drink from the fountain which I drink from?’ The lamb answered, ‘It is my mother’s breast that gives me my drink.’ The wolf then seized the lamb and as he chewed he said, ‘You are not going to make this wolf go without his dinner, even if you are able to easily refute every one of my charges!’

NOTE: The similarities between this fable and the Buddhist *Dipi-jataka* are striking. In the Buddhist fable a goat tries to fend off an aggressive panther: the panther accuses the goat of having stepped on his tail, and the goat replies that the panther is facing the goat, making it impossible to have stepped on his tail, etc.

Fable 131 (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 202 ff. = Perry 4)

The Hawk and the Nightingale

This is how the hawk addressed the dapple-throated nightingale as he carried her high into the clouds, holding her tightly in his talons. As the nightingale sobbed pitifully, pierced by the hawk’s crooked talons, the hawk pronounced these words of power, ‘Wretched creature, what are you prattling about? You are in the grip of one who is far stronger than you, and you will go wherever I may lead you, even if you are a singer. You will be my dinner, if that’s what I want, or I might decide to let you go.’

It is a foolish man who thinks he can oppose people who are more powerful he is: he will be defeated in the contest, suffering both pain and humiliation.

NOTE: Hesiod's account of the hawk and the nightingale is the oldest attested Aesopic fable in Greek literature (*c.* eighth century BCE). I have taken the last two lines as an epimythium, rather than including them as part of the hawk's speech to the nightingale. Hesiod's treatment of this fable (and the final lines) has been much discussed; for a recent assessment, see van Dijk 2F1.

Fable 132 (Avianus 28 = Perry 582)

The Bullock and the Farmer

When a bullock resisted the harness and thwarted all efforts to place his rugged neck beneath the clamp of the yoke, the farmer trimmed the animal's horns with a crosswise cut of the knife and thought the animal had thus been quieted down. Given that the beast was only too prompt with horn and hoof, the farmer then proceeded very carefully as he hitched the bullock's neck to an enormous plough, no doubt hoping that the long beam would keep him from lashing out, making it hard for the cruel hooves to land a blow. But the bullock began to struggle angrily, pushing with his neck against the ropes and uselessly wearying the innocent earth with his hooves. By stamping his feet he swiftly scattered the stirred-up dirt and it was blown by a blast of wind into his master's face as he followed the plough. The farmer then shook the dirt from his hair, which was

stiff with filth and grit. The defeated farmer groaned and said, ‘I must have needed to learn a lesson in this type of criminal behaviour in which someone uses his intelligence simply to wreak havoc.’

NOTE: Compare the altogether more satisfying conclusion in Caxton (7.21), when the frustrated farmer finally says to the bullock: ‘For I shalle take the in to the bouchers handes | And thenne was the bole wel chastysed.’

Fable 133 (Phaedrus *App*. 26 = Perry 553)

The Sheep and the Crow

A detestable crow had seated herself atop a sheep so that the sheep had to carry the crow around against her will. After a while, the sheep remarked, ‘If you had done this to a dog, you would not be able to get away with it: dogs have teeth!’ The obnoxious crow replied, ‘I despise creatures who cannot defend themselves, yet I yield to the high and mighty, as I know who should be attacked and who should be flattered with cunning lies. That is why I last to a ripe old age, living for thousands of years.’

NOTE: The crow was a proverbially long-lived bird in Greco-Roman folklore, with a lifespan equal to that of nine generations of men (see Ovid, *Amores* 2.6.35). The deer was another proverbially long-lived animal; see Fable 600.

Fable 134 (Chambry 21* = Perry 23)

The Partridge and the Roosters

A man who kept roosters also bought himself a partridge and let it loose to live among his other birds. When the roosters pecked at the partridge and chased him away, the partridge became very dejected, thinking that the roosters were attacking him because he was an outsider. After a little while, however, the partridge saw the roosters fighting and attacking each other. The partridge then put aside his grief and said, 'Well, I am certainly not going to grieve over this any longer, now that I see the way they fight with one another.'

The story shows that a wise person readily tolerates the insolence of strangers when he sees those same strangers mistreating one another.

Fable 135 (Chambry 122* = Perry 221)

Zeus and the Snake

Zeus was getting married and all the animals brought gifts to the wedding. The snake also came creeping along, holding a rose in his mouth. When Zeus saw him, he said, 'I am willing to take gifts from all the other animals, even when they carry them in their feet, but from your mouth, I will take nothing.'

The fable shows that even the favours of wicked people are frightening.

Fable 136 (*Life of Aesop* 141 = Perry 379)

The Man and His Daughter

There was a man who had fallen in love with his own daughter. Goaded by lust, he sent his wife to the countryside, whereupon he forced himself violently on his daughter. She said to him, ‘Father, you are committing an unholy crime. I would rather have offered myself to a hundred men than to you!’

FABLES ABOUT WICKEDNESS PUNISHED

Fable 137 (Ademar 39 = Perry 567)

The Nightingale, the Hawk, and the Bird-catcher

A hawk who was hunting a rabbit alighted in a nightingale’s nest and found her baby chicks there. When the nightingale returned, she begged the hawk to spare the chicks. The hawk said, ‘I will grant your request, if you sing me a pretty song.’ Even through she mustered all her courage, the nightingale trembled with fear. Stricken with terror, she started to sing but her song was full of grief. The hawk who had seized her chicks exclaimed, ‘That is not a very nice song!’ He then snatched up one of the chicks and swallowed it. Meanwhile, a bird-catcher approached from behind and stealthily raised his snare: the hawk was caught in the sticky birdlime and fell to the ground.

People who lay traps for others should be careful not to fall into a trap themselves.

NOTE: For a description of the bird-catcher’s use of a snare made of reeds covered with viscous birdlime, see Fable 138 (following).

Fable 138 (Chambry 137* = Perry 115)

The Bird-catcher and the Viper

The bird-catcher took his birdlime and reeds and went out to catch some birds. When he saw a thrush perched high in a tree, he set up his reeds, attaching them one to another until they were fully extended. He then stared up into the tree, intent on catching the bird, while unawares he stepped on top of a viper that was lying at his feet. The viper was enraged and bit the man. As he breathed his last, the bird-catcher said, 'Woe is me! I was intent on stalking someone else, while I myself have been hunted to death by another.'

The story shows that when people plot against their neighbours, they fall victim to the same sort of plot themselves.

NOTE: Alciato, *Emblems* 105, assimilates this fable of the bird-catcher to the proverbial philosopher or astronomer who looks up and does not notice what is happening at his feet (see Fable 314): 'Thus dies the man who looks up at the stars with his bow drawn taut, careless of the destiny which lies at his feet.'

Fable 139 (Ademar 4 = Perry 384)

The Frog and the Mouse

A mouse asked a frog to help her get across the river. The frog tied the mouse's front leg to her own back leg using a piece of string and they swam out to the middle of the stream. The frog then turned traitor and plunged down into the water, dragging the mouse along

with her. The mouse's dead body floated up to the surface and was drifting along when a kite flew by and noticed something he could snatch. When he grabbed the mouse he also carried off her friend the frog. Thus the treacherous frog who had betrayed the mouse's life was likewise killed and eaten.

For people who do harm to others and destroy themselves in the bargain.

NOTE: For a more elaborate version of this story, see Fable 140 (following). The story of the mouse and the frog occasions one of the most extensive allegorical meditations in Rumi's *Mathnawi*, 6.2632 ff.

Fable 140 (*Life of Aesop* 133 = Perry 384)

The Frog and the Mouse

Back when all the animals spoke the same language, the mouse became friends with a frog and invited him to dinner. The mouse then took the frog into a storeroom filled to the rafters with bread, meat, cheese, olives, and dried figs and said, 'Eat!' Since the mouse had shown him such warm hospitality, the frog said to the mouse, 'Now you must come to my place for dinner, so that I can show you some warm hospitality too.' The frog then led the mouse to the pond and said to him, 'Dive into the water!' The mouse said, 'But I don't know how to dive!' So the frog said, 'I will teach you.' He used a piece of string to tie the mouse's foot to his own and then jumped into the pond, dragging the mouse down with him. As the mouse

was choking, he said, ‘Even if I’m dead and you’re still alive, I will get my revenge!’ The frog then plunged down into the water, drowning the mouse. As the mouse’s body floated to the surface of the water and drifted along, a raven grabbed hold of it together with the frog who was still tied to the mouse by the string. After the raven finished eating the mouse he then grabbed the frog. In this way the mouse got his revenge on the frog.

Fable 141 (Chambry 290* = Perry 196)

The Snake and the Crab

A snake and a crab had become friends and were living together. The crab had a straightforward character and he urged the snake to change his wicked ways, but the snake refused to follow the crab’s good advice. So the crab kept an eye on the snake and when he found him sleeping he grabbed the snake by the neck and squeezed him to death between his claws. As he was dying, the snake stretched out straight. The crab then remarked, ‘Hey, if you had been this straightforward to begin with, I would not have had to punish you for your crooked behaviour!’

This fable shows that people who treat their friends deceitfully end up hurting themselves instead.

NOTE: A version of this story is cited by Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 15.50, as an Athenian drinking song. For the proverbially crooked crab, see Fable 369.

Fable 142 (Phaedrus 1.9 = Perry 473)

The Hare and the Sparrow

With this brief fable I will show that it is a foolish thing to give advice to others while not looking out for oneself.

A hare had been seized by an eagle and was weeping bitter tears. Meanwhile, a sparrow was making fun of the hare and said, 'So, what became of your fabled swiftness? How did your feet happen to fail you?' While the sparrow was still speaking, he was caught off guard by a hawk who killed the sparrow as he was still shrieking his useless cries of protest. The hare, by now no more than half alive, remarked, 'Ah, this makes my dying easier: a moment ago you were making fun of my misfortune, confident in your own safety, but now you are bewailing your fate with a lament that matches my own.'

Fable 143 (Chambry 135* = Perry 128)

The Kite and the Snake

A kite seized a snake and flew up high in the sky carrying the snake along with him. The snake then twisted around and struck the kite, so that they both fell down to the ground. As the kite was about to die from the force of the impact, the snake remarked, 'You have no right to get angry, you scoundrel, since you plotted destruction for someone who had done you no wrong! You deserve to suffer, and this is a fitting punishment for what you planned to do.'

NOTE: For a very similar fable but with a different moral interpretation, see Fable 460.

Fable 144 (Aphthonius 27 = Perry 400)

The Shepherd and the Honeybees

A story about honeybees and a shepherd, urging us not to set our hearts on wicked gains.

Some honeybees were making honey in the hollow of an oak tree. A shepherd discovered the bees' work and attempted to carry away some of the honey. The honeybees flew all around him, stinging the man with their stings. In the end the shepherd exclaimed, 'I give up! I don't need the honey if it means dealing with the bees.'

Trouble awaits you if you pursue ill-gotten gains.

NOTE: Compare the Greek proverb, 'no honey, no bees' (Erasmus, *Adages* 1.6.62), which was used to refer to a person who rejected something pleasant because of some unpleasantness that accompanied it.

FABLES ABOUT THE TRICKSTER TRICKED

Fable 145 (Chambry 270 = Perry 191)

The Fox, the Donkey, and the Lion

The fox and the donkey were partners in a hunting expedition, but when they encountered a lion the fox recognized the danger they

were in. She went to the lion and offered to betray the donkey if the lion would promise to spare her life in return. The lion agreed to let the fox go, and the fox then led the donkey into a trap and made him fall in. Once he saw that the donkey could not escape, the lion immediately seized the fox, saving the donkey for later.

Likewise, it is often the case that if you plot against your associates, you will be destroyed together with them.

Fable 146 (Ademar 40 = Perry 568)

The Wolf, the Fox, and the Shepherd

A wolf had assembled an immense store of booty in his den so that he could feast on all sorts of delicacies for months into the future. When the fox found out about this she paid a visit to the wolf and spoke to him in anxious tones, 'Why should I be deprived of your company these many days? I've been in tears since you have not come outside.' The wolf replied spitefully, 'You didn't come here out of any concern for me; you're just hoping to get something. I know you must have had some reason for coming here: you are trying to trick me!' This made the fox extremely angry, so she went to the shepherd and said to him, 'Would you like it if I turned the enemy of your flock over to you today so that you wouldn't have to worry about him any more?' The shepherd replied, 'I will be at your service and will give you whatever you want.' The fox immediately led the shepherd to where the wolf was hiding and the shepherd killed the wolf with his lance. He then let the spiteful fox eat her fill

of someone else's larder. Eventually the fox fell foul of hunters and was caught by their hounds. As she was being torn to pieces, the fox exclaimed, 'Just as I committed a serious crime, now I am going to die, since I brought about someone else's death.'

If you injure other people, you need to watch out, or somebody else will injure you too.

> NOTE: L'Estrange's epimythium abounds with proverbs: "Tis with Sharpers as 'tis with Pikes, they prey upon their own kind; and 'tis a pleasant Scene enough, when Thieves fall out among themselves, to see the cutting of one Diamond with another.'

Fable 147 (Chambry 16* = Perry 279)

The Goat and the Donkey

There was a man who kept a goat and a donkey. The goat was jealous of the donkey because he was given more to eat, so she made a deceptive proposal to the donkey, under the guise of giving him advice. 'Look,' said the goat, 'you are always being punished, constantly having to turn the millstone or carry burdens on your back. Why don't you pretend to have a seizure and throw yourself into a ditch?' The donkey trusted the goat and did what she told him to do. As a result of the fall, the donkey was badly scraped and bruised. The donkey's owner summoned a doctor to recommend a remedy. The doctor said that the donkey could be cured by a potion made from the lungs of a goat. So they slaughtered the unfortunate

goat, who was thus trapped in her own snare while the donkey was saved.

People who lay traps for others bring about their own destruction.

NOTE: For a similar story about a wolf and a fox, see Fable 17.

Fable 148 (Ademar 30 = Perry 562)

The Fox and the Partridge

A partridge had seated herself high on a perch when a fox came up to her and said, ‘How beautiful you are to look at: your legs are so red! your mouth is like coral! Ah, if only you were sleeping, you would be even more lovely …’ The partridge believed the fox and closed her eyes, and the fox immediately grabbed her. In a voice choked with sobs, the partridge said to the fox, ‘I beg you, in the name of all your artful wiles, please say my name before you eat me up.’ As the fox’s mouth opened to pronounce the word ‘partridge’, the partridge flew out and escaped. The fox said sadly, ‘Woe is me, what need was there for me to speak?’ The partridge likewise said, ‘Woe is me, what reason was there for me to close my eyes, when I wasn’t even sleepy?’

For people who speak when there is no reason to do so and who go to sleep when they should be on their guard.

NOTE: For a similar fable about a fox and a rooster, see Fable 149 (following).

Fable 149 (Chambry 180* = Perry 252)

The Fox, the Rooster, and the Dog

A dog and a rooster had become friends and were making a journey together. When night fell, they came to a place in the woods. The rooster took his seat up in the branches of a tree while the dog went to sleep in a hollow at the foot of the tree. The night passed and day was dawning when the rooster crowed loudly, as roosters usually do. A fox heard the rooster and wanted to make a meal of him, so she came running up and stood at the foot of the tree and shouted to the rooster, 'You are an excellent bird and so useful to people! Why don't you come down and we'll sing some songs together, delighting in one another's company.' The rooster replied, 'Go over to the foot of the tree, my dear, and tell the watchman to let you in.' When the fox went to announce herself, the dog suddenly leaped up and grabbed the fox, tearing her to pieces.

The story shows that people are the same way: if you are wise, you take up arms to save yourself whenever you run into trouble.

Fable 150 (Avianus 25 = Perry 581)

The Boy and the Thief

A boy was weeping as he sat upon a well at the water's edge, his mouth gasping and gulping in a great show of extravagant sobs. A sly thief noticed that the boy was crying and asked him why he was so distraught. The boy pretended that his rope had snapped and broken, and that he was bewailing the loss of a golden jug that had

fallen down into the well. Without a moment's hesitation, the thief's criminal fingers peeled off his hampering garments and he plunged directly into the depths of the well. As the story goes, the little boy then tied the thief's cloak around his own little neck and disappeared out of sight in the bushes. After the thief had risked danger for a deceptive reward, he plopped down on the ground and lamented the loss of his cloak. The clever thief is said to have made the following speech as he sighed and complained to the gods of heaven: 'So be it! From now on, if anybody is foolish enough to think there could be a jug lurking beneath these transparent waters, let him beware! He will loose the shirt off his back, just as he deserves.'

Fable 151 (Chambry 318* = Perry 210)

The Boy Who Cried 'Wolf'

There was a boy tending the sheep who would continually go up to the embankment and shout, 'Help, there's a wolf!' The farmers would all come running only to find out that what the boy said was not true. Then one day there really was a wolf, but when the boy shouted they didn't believe him and no one came to his aid. The whole flock was eaten by the wolf.

The story shows that this is how liars are rewarded: even if they tell the truth, no one believes them.

Fable 152 (Babrius 111 = Perry 180)

The Merchant, the Donkey, and the Salt

A merchant who owned a donkey heard that salt was cheaper by the seashore, so he decided to go into the salt business. He went and loaded his donkey with salt and then headed back home. At a certain moment, the donkey accidentally lost his footing and fell straight into a stream. This caused the salt to dissolve, making his load lighter. The donkey was thus able to rise easily to his feet and enjoy a less taxing journey home. The merchant sold what was left of the salt and led the donkey back again to load him with an even greater cargo than before. As the donkey made his way with difficulty back to the stream where he had fallen before, he sank to his knees, on purpose this time. Then, after his cargo had dissolved in the water, he leaped nimbly to his feet, delighted to have turned the situation to his advantage, or so he thought. The merchant realized what was happening and decided that the next time he would bring back home a big load of porous sponges. On their way back across the stream, the wicked donkey fell down on purpose as before. This time the sponges grew heavy with water and the cargo expanded. As a result, the donkey had to carry a burden that was twice as heavy as it had been to begin with.

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: 'It often happens that the same things which brought us luck can also get us into trouble.' Aelian, *Characteristics of Animals* 7.42, tells this same story about a mule who tries to trick Thales, one of the legendary seven sages of Greece.

FABLES ABOUT VENGEANCE

Fable 153 (*Life of Aesop* 135 = Perry 3)

The Dung Beetle and the Eagle

As he was being chased by an eagle, the hare ran to the dung beetle, begging the beetle to save him. The beetle implored the eagle to respect the hare's asylum, solemnly compelling him by the sacred name of Zeus and pleading with the eagle not to disregard him simply because of his small size. But the eagle brushed the beetle aside with a flick of his wing and grabbed the hare, tearing him to pieces and devouring him. The beetle was enraged and flew off together with the eagle to find the nest in which the eagle kept his eggs. After the eagle was gone, the beetle smashed all the eggs. When the eagle came back, he was dreadfully upset and looked for the creature who had smashed the eggs, intending to tear him to pieces. When it was time for the eagle to nest again, he put his eggs in an even higher place, but the beetle flew all the way up to the nest, smashed the eggs, and went away. The eagle grieved for his little ones and said that this must be the result of some angry plot of Zeus to exterminate the eagle race. When the next season came, the eagle did not feel secure keeping the eggs in his nest and instead went up to Olympus and placed the eggs in Zeus's lap. The eagle said to Zeus, 'Twice my eggs have been destroyed; this time, I am leaving them here under your protection.' When the beetle found out what the eagle had done, he stuffed himself with dung and went straight up to Zeus and flew right into his face. At the sight of this

filthy creature, Zeus was startled and leaped to his feet, forgetting that he held the eagle's eggs inside his lap. As a result, the eggs were broken once again. Zeus then learned of the wrong that had been done to the beetle, and when the eagle returned, Zeus said to him, 'It is only right that you have lost your little ones, since you mistreated the beetle!' The beetle said, 'The eagle treated me badly, but he also acted very impiously towards you, O Zeus! The eagle did not fear to violate your sacred name, and he killed the one who had taken refuge with me. I will not cease until I have punished the eagle completely!' Zeus did not want the race of eagles to be wiped out, so he urged the beetle to relent. When his efforts to persuade the beetle failed, Zeus changed the breeding season of the eagles, so that it would take place at a time when the beetles were not found above ground.

> NOTE: The fable of the dung beetle and the eagle is alluded to on three occasions by Aristophanes: *Wasps* 1448, *Lysistrata* 695, and *Peace* 127–34. In Caxton (6.2), the dung beetle is replaced by a weasel!

Fable 154 (Phaedrus 1.28 = Perry 1)

The Eagle and the Fox

Even a high and mighty person should beware of his inferiors; their ingenuity can find a way to take revenge.

There was once an eagle who stole the cubs of a fox and carried them off to her nest as food for her chicks to peck at. The mother fox set off in pursuit, begging the eagle not to impose this unbearable loss on such a miserable creature as herself. The eagle scoffed at her request, fully confident in the loftiness of her own position. The fox then snatched a burning faggot from the altar and completely surrounded the tree with flames, threatening pain to her enemy at the cost of her own flesh and blood. The eagle conceded: in order to snatch her chicks from the maw of death, she returned the fox's cubs unharmed.

NOTE: The fable of the unhappy friendship between the fox and the eagle was already attested in the Greek poet Archilochus, *c*.650 BCE (frag. 174 West). It is also alluded to in Aristophanes, *Birds* 652–3. For a quite different ending to the story, see Fable 155 (following).

Fable 155 (Syntipas 24 = Perry 1)

The Eagle and the Fox

The eagle befriended the fox but he later devoured the fox's cubs. Since she had no power over the eagle, the fox prayed to the gods for justice. Then one day when a sacrifice was burning upon an altar, the eagle flew down and grabbed the sizzling meat to carry it off to his chicks. The meat was so hot that as soon as the chicks ate it, they died.

This fable shows that even if the victims of powerful and wicked people cannot get revenge directly, the gods will nevertheless inflict a punishment on them in response to their victims' prayers.

Fable 156 (Phaedrus 1.26 = Perry 426)

The Fox and the Stork

Do no harm—and if someone does get hurt, then turn-about is fair play, as this fable cautions.

The fox is said to have started it by inviting the stork to dinner and serving a liquid broth on a marble slab which the hungry stork could not so much as taste. The stork, in turn, invited the fox to dinner and served a narrow-mouthed jug filled with crumbled food. The stork was able to thrust her beak inside and eat as much as she wanted, while her guest was tormented with hunger. As the fox was licking the neck of the jug in vain, the stork is supposed to have said, 'When others follow your example, you have to grin and bear it.'

> NOTE: Caxton (2.13) supplies the English proverb, 'with the staf which he had made he was bete'. The story of the fox and the stork is also found in Plutarch, *Symposiastic Questions* 1.1.

Fable 157 (Aphthonius 37 = Perry 374)

The Goat and the Vine

The vine was covered with clusters of grapes and its shoots were as vigorous as its fruit. A goat began to eat the vine, indulging his outrageous appetite. He had already wreaked havoc on the fresh shoots when the vine said to him, ‘You will pay for this outrage! The time will soon come when you will be sent as a holy victim to be sacrificed, and I myself will be the one to supply the wine for the libation!’

The things that a person does to others will happen to him in turn.

NOTE: This fable is also found in the *Greek Anthology* 9.99. For the deer and the vine, see Fable 80.

Fable 158 (Phaedrus 3.5 = Perry 497)

Aesop and the Hooligan

Success has been the ruin of many a man.

There was a hooligan who struck Aesop with a stone. Aesop said, ‘Well done!’ and he even gave the boy a coin. Then he added, ‘Confound it, that’s all the cash I’ve got, but I’ll show you more where that came from. Look, the man coming this way is a wealthy and important person; if you can hit him with a stone the same way you hit me, you’ll get the reward you deserve.’ The hooligan was convinced and did as Aesop told him, but his hope for a reward brought his reckless daring to ruin: he was arrested and paid the price for his crime on the cross.

NOTE: For another example of the Roman punishment of crucifixion, see Fable 577.

FABLES ABOUT JEALOUSY AND SPITE

Fable 159 (Chambry 114* = Perry 68)

The Two Enemies

There were two enemies who had set sail on the same ship. They wanted to keep their distance from one another, so one went up on the prow while the other took the stern. Each man then stayed where he was. Soon a fierce storm began to blow and the ship foundered. The man standing at the stern asked the helmsman which part of the ship was likely to sink first. 'It will be the prow', said the helmsman. 'So be it!' said the man. 'The thought of death does not trouble me so long as I will see my enemy die before me!'

So too there are people who feel such ill-will towards their neighbours that they elect to suffer something dreadful themselves so that they can see the others suffering along with them.

Fable 160 (Chambry 132* = Perry 113)

The Tuna Fish and the Dolphin

A tuna fish who was being chased by a dolphin was splashing madly through the water. Just when the dolphin was about to catch him, the tuna fish heaved himself forward with a great effort and landed on an island. Matching his effort, the dolphin ran aground beside

him. The tuna fish then turned to look at the gasping dolphin and said, ‘I do not grieve over my own death, so long as I am able to see that the one to blame is dying together with me!’

The fable shows that people readily undergo a disaster when they can witness the destruction of those who are to blame.

Fable 161 (Chambry 331* = Perry 216)

The Snake and the Wasp

A wasp landed on the head of a snake and began to harass him, stinging him again and again. As he was suffering from terrible pain but couldn’t get rid of his enemy, the snake crawled into the road and looked for an oncoming wagon. He then put his head under the wheel as he said, ‘I die together with my enemy!’

This is a fable for people who share their troubles with their enemies.

Fable 162 (Avianus 22 = Perry 580)

Greed and Jealousy

To become better acquainted with the baffling logic of mortal men, Jupiter sent Phoebus Apollo from the heavenly citadel to visit the earth. At that moment two men happened to be asking the gods to fulfill their opposite prayers: one of the men was greedy, and the other was a jealous man. The mighty god examined each of them and offered himself as a mediator. When they made their requests, Apollo told them, ‘The gods agree to grant your prayers, but the thing that one of you requests will immediately be given twofold to

the other.' The greedy man whose limitless desire could never satisfy his longing allowed the other man to choose first, expecting to augment his prospects by that man's prayer, thus carrying off two prizes for himself. Instead, he met with an unexpected loss, since the jealous man realized that the other man was trying to take his own reward. Thus, he voluntarily requested that a punishment be inflicted on his body: by asking to be blinded in one eye, he thus condemned the other man to a life of total darkness, with two blind eyes. The wise Apollo laughed at the human condition and told Jupiter about the wickedness spawned by such jealous feelings: because it rejoices in the unhappy things that happen to other people, wretched jealousy gladly works to its own disadvantage.

Fable 163 (Steinhowel, Fab. Ext. 11 = Perry 702)

The Dog in the Manger

People frequently begrudge something to others that they themselves cannot enjoy. Even though it does them no good, they won't let others have it. Listen to a fable about such an event.

There was a wicked dog lying in a manger full of hay. When the cattle came and wanted to eat, the dog barred their way, baring his teeth. The cattle said to the dog, 'You are being very unfair by begrudging us something we need which is useless to you. Dogs don't eat hay, but you will not let us near it.' The same thing happened when a dog was holding a bone in his mouth: the dog

couldn't chew on the bone that way, but no other dog was able to chew on it either.

The fable shows that it is not easy to avoid envy: with some effort you can try to escape its effects, but it never goes away entirely.

NOTE: Although this story is not attested in the ancient Greek and Roman fables, the proverbial 'dog in the manger' makes his appearance in Lucian, *Against the Unlearned* 30: 'There was a dog lying in a manger who did not eat the grain but who nevertheless prevented the horse from being able to eat anything either.'

Fable 164 (Phaedrus *App*. 1 = Perry 533)

The Monkey and the Fox

A monkey asked a fox to give him a part of her tail so that he could respectably cover up his bare behind. The malicious fox said in reply, 'Even if my tail grew longer than it is now, I would sooner drag it through filth and thorns than share even the smallest part of it with you!'

NOTE: There is a promythium appended to the fable in Perotti's Appendix: 'A greedy man does not gladly give anything away, even when he has enough for himself For the traditional enmity between the fox and the monkey, see Fable 24.

FABLES ABOUT JUSTICE

Fable 165 (Phaedrus 2.1 = Perry 487)

The Lion and the Two Men

A lion was standing over a young bull whom he had killed when a robber showed up and demanded a part of the spoils. ‘I would agree,’ the lion said, ‘if you were not already in the habit of taking whatever you want!’ Thus, the lion refused the villain’s request. Meanwhile, an innocent wayfarer also happened upon the very same spot, although he backed away as soon as he saw the ferocious lion. ‘There is nothing to be afraid of,’ the lion said to him in kindly tones. ‘Please, take without hesitation the portion of this prize that your modesty has earned for you.’ He then divided the bull into pieces and went away into the woods, so that the man would come forward freely.

This is an altogether outstanding and admirable model of behaviour; in the real world, however, greed grows wealthy while honesty goes unrewarded.

NOTE: For the traditional version of ‘the lion’s share,’ see Fable 14.

Fable 166 (Phaedrus 4.26 = Perry 522)

Simonides and the Twin Gods

Elsewhere I have described the great value people place on learning, and now I will record for future reference how greatly learning is honoured by the gods; this is another story about Simonides, whom I have spoken of before.

In exchange for an agreed-upon fee, the poet Simonides was to write a victory ode for a certain boxer. Simonides accordingly sought out a place of peace and quiet, but the unpromising subject-matter hampered his artistic impulse. As a result, Simonides relied on the usual poetic licence, which allowed him to include the gods Castor and Pollux as part of his poem, alluding to the renown that the sons of Leda, those celestial twins, had also enjoyed in boxing. Simonides' client praised the work but he paid the poet only one third of the agreed-upon fee. When Simonides demanded the rest, his patron told him, 'Let the twins pay the rest, since their praise occupies two-thirds of the poem! Of course,' the man added, 'I don't want people to think that you have been sent away in anger, so please agree to come to my house for dinner this evening. I have invited all my relatives, and I want you to be in their number as well.' Although Simonides had been cheated and was still upset about the loss he had suffered, he agreed to come, not wanting to harm his reputation by parting with his patron on bad terms. The dinner hour arrived and Simonides took his place at the table. The party sparkled with wine and good cheer, and the house resounded with the delightful sounds of the extravagant banquet, when all of a sudden two young men appeared. They were completely covered with dust and sweat, and they had the bodies of supermen. They ordered one of the servant boys to summon Simonides, urging him to be quick about it, as it was a matter of great importance. The awestruck servant roused Simonides, and the poet had barely moved one foot away from the dining room when the structure suddenly

collapsed, crushing everyone beneath it. Meanwhile, there were no young men to be found at the door. When the sequence of events became generally known, everyone realized that, with their presence, the gods had repaid the poet by saving his life in lieu of a fee.

NOTE: Other accounts of this story focus on the aftermath of these events: Simonides was able to identify all the victims of the disaster, despite the fact that their bodies were mangled beyond recognition, because he remembered where each person was sitting, using the technique of the '*loci*' or 'places', a popular mnemonic device (see Cicero, *Orator* 2.86 and Quintilian, *Institutes* 11.2.11 ff.). For Phaedrus' other story about the Greek poet Simonides, see Fable 412.

Fable 167 (Chambry 214 = Perry 152)

The Murderer and the Mulberry Tree

A robber had murdered someone along the road. When the bystanders began to chase him, he dropped the bloody corpse and ran away. Some travellers coming from the opposite direction asked the man how he had stained his hands. The man said that he had just climbed down from a mulberry tree, but as he was speaking, his pursuers caught up with him. They seized the murderer and crucified him on a mulberry tree. The tree said to him, 'It does not trouble me at all to assist in your execution, since you tried to smear me with the murder that you yourself committed!'

It often happens that even honest people do not hesitate to persecute someone who has slandered them.

Fable 168 (Chambry 45* = Perry 32)

The Murderer and the Nile

A man had committed a murder and was being pursued by the victim's relatives. He reached the river Nile, and when he found a lion there he was afraid and climbed up a tree; in the tree, he saw a snake and was practically scared to death, so he threw himself into the river, where a crocodile devoured him.

The story is for people who commit murders: neither earth nor air nor water nor any other place will be able to protect them.

> NOTE: Other versions of this fable (included in Chambry's first edition of the Greek fables) feature a wolf instead of a lion.

Fable 169 (Syntipas 52 = Perry 347)

The Wolf and the Lion

A wolf had seized a young pig and was carrying it away when he ran into a lion. The lion immediately took the pig away from him. After having to surrender the pig, the wolf said to himself, 'I wondered myself how what I acquired by theft could possibly have stayed with me.'

The fable shows that if someone acquires other people's property by fraud or force, he cannot expect to keep it.

Fable 170 (Chambry 298 = Perry 239)

The Oath's Punishment

A certain man took a deposit from a friend but intended to keep it for himself. When the depositor then summoned him to swear an oath regarding the deposit, he realized the danger he was in and prepared to leave the city and go to his farm. When he reached the city gates, he saw a lame man who was also on his way out of town. He asked the man who he was and where he was going. The man said that he was the god named Oath and that he was on his way to track down wicked people. The man then asked Oath how often he revisited each city. Oath replied, 'I come back after forty years, or sometimes thirty.' Accordingly, on the very next day the man did not hesitate to swear an oath that he had never received the deposit. But then the man ran into Oath, who dragged him off to the edge of a cliff. The man asked Oath how he could have said that he wasn't coming back for another thirty years when in fact he didn't even grant him a single day's reprieve. Oath explained, 'You also need to know that if somebody intends to provoke me, I am accustomed to come back again the very same day.'

The fable shows that there is no fixed day on which wicked people are punished by the god.

NOTE: The divine embodiment of the oath, called *Horkos* in Greek, was represented as being lame, since it often took him a very long time to catch up with oath-breakers and punish them. For another

account of why the gods' justice is frequently delayed, see Fable 524.

Fable 171 (Babrius 117 = Perry 306)

Hermes, the Man, and the Ants

There was once a ship that sank with all hands on board. A man who saw what had happened said that the gods' judgement was unfair: because of just one sinner who was on board the ship, many men had died together with him, even though they were innocent. While the man was speaking, a swarm of ants started crawling over him as they rushed in their usual frenzy to feed on some bits of wheat chaff. When one of the ants bit the man, he proceeded to trample a considerable number of them underfoot. Hermes then appeared and struck the man with his wand as he said, 'So, are you going to let the gods pass judgement on you humans just as you have passed judgement on the ants?'

NOTE: The god Hermes carried a special wand in his role as a messenger and herald of the gods, in addition to his famous winged sandals.

Fable 172 (Syntipas 18 = Perry 198)

Apollo and the Snake

A creeping snake who had been stepped on by many people made his way to the temple of Apollo and went inside. Apollo

immediately explained to the snake, ‘If you had simply killed the first person who stepped on you, no one would ever have dared to step on you again!’

The story shows that if people who have previously committed a crime are swiftly punished, then others will become afraid on their account.

Fable 173 (Syntipas 56 = Perry 64)

The Man Bitten by the Dog

A man who had just been badly bitten by a dog was looking for someone who could heal his wound. He ran into someone who told him, ‘Here is what you need to do: let the blood from your wound drip onto a piece of bread and then feed the bread to the dog who bit you. If you do that, your wound will be cured.’ The man who had been bitten by the dog replied, ‘But if I do that, every single dog in the city will want to bite me!’

This fable shows that if someone respects and honours a wicked man, the wicked man will not return the favour, since his only friends are other wicked men like himself.

NOTE: In another version of this fable (Phaedrus 2.3), the man actually gives the blood-soaked bread to the dog who bit him, provoking Aesop to remark that if the other dogs find out, they will all want to bite him.

FABLES ABOUT COURTS AND JUDGES

Fable 174 (Phaedrus 1.17 = Perry 478)

The Sheep, the Dog, and the Wolf

Wicked liars generally get their just deserts.

A dog made false accusations against the sheep, demanding that she pay him back a loaf of bread which, he insisted, the sheep had supposedly borrowed from him. The dog summoned the wolf as his witness and the wolf testified that the sheep didn't owe the dog just one loaf of bread: he swore that she owed him ten! Based on this false evidence, the sheep was found guilty and was sentenced to pay what she did not owe. A few days later the sheep found the same wolf lying dead in a ditch. 'This,' said the sheep, 'is the reward that the gods give to liars.'

NOTE: For a less rousing conclusion, see Fable 175 (following).

Fable 175 (Ademar 5 = Perry 478)

The Sheep, the Dog, and the Witnesses

A dog made false accusations against the sheep, saying, 'You must give me back the bread which I gave you on loan.' This led to an argument, since the sheep insisted that she had never taken any bread from the dog. When they took the matter to court, the dog reportedly claimed to have witnesses. The wolf was brought in and he swore, 'I know that the sheep borrowed bread from the dog.' The kite was brought in and he swore, 'I saw the sheep take it.' As the hawk came in, he said to the sheep, 'Do you deny that you took it?'

Defeated by these three false witness, the sheep was hard pressed to pay back the loan; in order to return what she had not borrowed, she was forced to fleece herself of her own wool and sell it.

For someone who treacherously persecutes and destroys innocent people.

NOTE: Walter of England (twelfth-century author of an extremely popular collection of fables in verse) is even more specific about the sheep's grim fate: 'even though winter was coming on, the sheep had to sell her own wool and suffer the north wind's blast while she was stripped bare of her own fleece.'

Fable 176 (Phaedrus 1.16 = Perry 477)

The Sheep, the Stag, and the Wolf

When a liar has dishonest backers, he is not trying to make a deal: he wants to play a dirty trick.

A stag asked the sheep to loan him a peck of wheat, with the wolf vouching for his good credit. The sheep, however, saw that there was trouble ahead, so she said, 'The wolf always just takes what he wants and vanishes, while you are the sort who turns tail and runs. How can I hope to find either of you when it comes time to collect?'

Fable 177 (Ademar 6 = Perry 558)

The Roosters and the Hawk

There was a rooster who was always quarrelling with another rooster, so he asked the hawk to judge their dispute. The rooster

was actually hoping that when he brought the other rooster before the judge, the judge would devour him. Yet when they came before the judge to make their arguments, the hawk grabbed the rooster who had originally brought the case to court. The rooster shouted, ‘Not me! You want the one who is running away!’ The hawk replied, ‘Abandon all hope of being released from my talons today! Justice demands that you yourself should suffer the punishment that you intended for another.’

For people who plot the demise of others, not realizing what might happen to them as a result.

Fable 178 (Phaedrus 3.13 = Perry 504)

The Bees, the Drones, and the Wasp

The bees had built their honeycombs up high in an oak tree but the lazy drones insisted that the honeycombs were theirs. The case went to court, with the wasp presiding. Given that the judge was well acquainted with both the bees and the drones, she made the following proposal to the two parties: ‘Your bodies are not dissimilar and your colouring is the same, which makes this an undeniably difficult decision. Of course, I want to be absolutely scrupulous, avoiding any hasty judgements. So, please take these hives and fill them full of waxen cells. The taste of the honey and the shape of the combs will reveal which party is actually responsible for the honeycombs in question.’ While the drones refused to comply with this request, the proposal greatly pleased the bees. Thereupon the

judge pronounced the following sentence: ‘It’s clear who was incapable of making those honeycombs, and who it was that made them. Accordingly, I return to the bees the fruit of their labours.’

I would not have included this fable except for the fact that the drones refused the chance to prove their credibility.

NOTE: Compare the proverbial saying that ‘even wasps build combs’ (e.g. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.5). The difference, of course, is that the wasps’ combs have no honey.

Fable 179 (Phaedrus 1.10 = Perry 474)

The Wolf, the Fox, and the Monkey

Once you get a reputation for dirty tricks, nobody is going to take you seriously, even if you are telling the truth, as one of Aesop’s fables attests.

The wolf had accused the fox of theft but the fox denied that she was guilty of the crime. The presiding judge was a monkey. Both of the plaintiffs pleaded their cases and the monkey is then said to have pronounced the following verdict: ‘As for you, wolf, I do not believe you lost the goods claimed in your suit; as for you, fox, I am convinced you stole the goods, no matter how firmly you deny it.’

Fable 180 (Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1435 ff. = Perry 438)

The Jar Goes to Court

There was a woman of Sybaris who broke a jar. The jar then got someone to testify as a witness, but the woman of Sybaris said, ‘I swear by the Maiden, you would have been far wiser if you’d gone right away to get a bandage, instead of making a court-case out of it.’

NOTE: Sybaris was a Greek city in southern Italy which was associated with a particular type of joking story, called a ‘Sybaritic’ fable (see Fable 344 for another example). ‘The Maiden’ (in Greek, *Kore*) was a cult name of Persephone, who was celebrated at the Eleusinian Mysteries, together with her mother Demeter.

Fable 181 (Babrius 118 = Perry 227)

The Swallow and the Snake

Spring had arrived, and a twittering swallow (that bird who dwells in human houses) built her nest in the wall of the place which is home to the elderly jurors of the court. In that hall of justice, the mother bird gave birth to seven baby birds. But a snake came creeping out from his hole and devoured all the chicks one by one. The wretched mother bewailed the untimely demise of her children and said, ‘Woe is me, and woe is my lot in life! This is the place where mankind’s laws and judgements are made but I, a swallow, am the victim of injustice and have to run away.’

NOTE: This fable can also be found in the *Greek Anthology* 7.210, although that version is not set in a courthouse (and the story ends with the snake falling into a fire).

DISPUTES AND DEBATES

Fable 182 (Babrius 68 = Perry 104)

Zeus and Apollo

As he made a distant shot with his bow and arrow, Apollo said to the gods, 'No one can shoot farther than I, not even Zeus.' Zeus played along and agreed to a contest. Hermes shook the lots in the helmet of Ares. The lot fell to Apollo, who went first, flexing the golden bowstring and swiftly letting loose an arrow which landed inside the Garden of the Hesperides. Zeus then covered the same distance in a single stride and stood there asking, 'Where should I shoot my arrow, son? There's nowhere for me to stand.' So it was that Zeus won the archery contest without even taking a shot.

NOTE: Ares was the Greek god of war (Roman Mars). The Hesperides were the daughters of Atlas, and together with a dragon they guarded a tree of golden apples in a garden at the western edge of the world.

Fable 183 (Syntipas 55 = Perry 46)

The North Wind and the Sun

The Sun and the North Wind were quarrelling with each other as to which of the two of them would be able to make a man disrobe. The North Wind went first, blowing fiercely against the man. Yet as the man grew colder and colder, he only wrapped himself up more snugly in his cloak, clutching at it tightly so as to keep a firm grip no matter how hard the wind might be blowing. Thus the North Wind did the man no harm at all and failed to make him strip off his clothes. Next, the Sun began to shine upon the man so brightly that the very air of the day grew hotter and hotter. The man immediately took off his cloak and bundled it up on his shoulders.

The fable shows that to take a humble approach is always more effective and practical than making empty boasts.

NOTE: This fable is also found in Plutarch, *Advice on Marriage* 12.

Fable 184 (Chambry 346 = Perry 271)

Winter and Spring

Winter made fun of Spring and mocked her for the fact that as soon as spring appears, nobody can keep still: some people go off to the meadows or into the woods, others like to gather flowers and lilies or perhaps to gaze upon a rose as they twirl it in the air, or to twine it in their hair; while some board ships and even cross the sea to meet different kinds of people; no one worries any longer about the winds or the great downpours of rain from the sky. ‘Whereas I resemble a dictator or a despot’, said Winter. ‘I command everyone

to look not at the sky but down toward the ground; I frighten them and make them tremble and sometimes I make them content themselves while having to stay indoors all day.' Spring replied, 'Indeed, that is exactly why mankind would be glad to get rid of you, whereas even the mere mention of my name is enough to bring them pleasure. By Zeus, there is no name more pleasant than mine! That is why they think fondly of me when I am gone and give thanks when I appear again.'

NOTE: This *topos* is also found in the medieval poem *Conflictus veris et hiemis*, attributed to Alcuin (d. 804).

Fable 185 (Babrius 15 = Perry 278)

The Athenian and the Theban

A man from Athens was journeying together with a man from Thebes in Boeotia. As you would expect, they struck up a conversation. The talk soon turned to heroes, and the men made all sorts of extravagant and pointless claims. The man from Thebes ended up singing the praises of Heracles, Alcmena's son, saying that he was the greatest hero who ever lived on this earth and that he had now taken his place among the gods. The man from Athens replied that Theseus was mightier by far, since he had enjoyed a truly divine fortune in his lifetime, while Heracles had been a slave. With this argument, the Athenian won the debate, for he was a glib speaker. His opponent was only a Boeotian, after all, and could not hope to compete with the Athenian in words. 'Enough!' the Boeotian

said, ‘You win!’ Then he added with a bit of rustic inspiration, ‘And may Theseus vent his anger on us, and Heracles on you Athenians!’

NOTE: Heracles was enslaved for three years to Omphale, the queen of Lydia, in order to expiate a murder. Theseus enjoyed ‘divine fortune’ as the king of a great city, Athens. The humour of this story depends on the smooth-talking Athenian being bested by a ‘country bumpkin’ from Boeotia since, when all is said and done, Heracles was a much more formidable hero than Theseus.

Fable 186 (Aphthonius 34 = Perry 284)

The Lion and the Man Disputing

A story about a lion and a man, urging us to be honest and to refrain from boasting.

A man and a lion were arguing. The man proclaimed the superiority of the human race, while the lion argued on behalf of his own kind. As they were contending with one another as to who was superior, the man produced as evidence the statue of a lion being defeated by a man. The lion retorted, ‘And if there were also sculptors among us lions, you would see more people being conquered by lions than lions by people!’

One who deals with others honestly will win the victory.

NOTE: For a more elaborate version of this same story, see Fable 187 (following).

Fable 187 (Ademar 52 = Perry 284)

The Lion and the Man Disputing

A man and a lion were arguing about who was best, with each one seeking evidence in support of his claim. They came to a tombstone on which a man was shown in the act of strangling a lion, and the man offered this picture as evidence. The lion then replied, 'It was a man who painted this; if a lion had painted it, you would instead see a lion strangling a man. But let's look at some real evidence instead.' The lion then brought the man to the amphitheatre and showed him, so he could see with his own eyes, just how a lion strangles a man. The lion then concluded, 'A pretty picture is not proof: facts are the only real evidence!'

When the evidence is fairly weighed, a colourfully painted lie is quickly refuted by the facts.

NOTE: The visit to the amphitheatre which is included here in Ademar is not found in the Greek versions of the fable. Caxton (4.15) has the lion prove his point even more directly: 'The lyon thenne ledde the man to a grete pytte | And there they fought to gyder | But the lyon caste the man in to the pytte | and submytted hym in to his subiection and sayd | Thow man | now knowest thow alle the trouthe | whiche of vs bothe is stronger.'

DEBATES AMONG THE ANIMALS

Fable 188 (Syntipas 14 = Perry 14)

The Fox, the Monkey, and His Ancestors

A fox and a monkey were travelling along the same road. They passed through a cemetery, and the monkey said to the fox, ‘All these dead people were the freedmen of my ancestors.’ The fox then said to the monkey, ‘This is an opportune moment for you to tell such lies: not a single one of the people entombed in this place can rise up and refute what you say!’

This fable can be used to indict charlatans and anyone who deals in lies instead of the truth.

Fable 189 (Chambry 35* = Perry 20)

The Fox and the Crocodile

The fox and the crocodile were disputing about their pedigrees. The crocodile was proudly enumerating the eminent qualities of his ancestors, and when he said that they had been the highest-ranking athletic officials, the fox remarked, ‘My dear sir, even if you had not mentioned it, the mere condition of your skin is evidence enough that you have suffered long years of athletic sports out of doors in the sun!’

> NOTE: The joke is based on the crocodile boasting that his ancestors had been ‘Gymnasiarchs’, city officials who presided over the athletic gymnasiums in ancient Greece.

Fable 190 (Avianus 38 = Perry 584)

The Saltwater Fish and the Freshwater Fish

Carried from his freshwater pond by a rushing stream, a freshwater fish rushed headlong into the waters of the sea. The shameless creature scorned the scaly schools in the sea and boasted endlessly of his own illustrious origins. A saltwater fish could not suffer this refugee in his own ancestral waters and he spoke these pungent words, naturally salted with wit: ‘Enough of your empty lies and pretentious talk; you yourself are the best evidence of their absurdity. If the two of us are captured and hauled in by the same dripping net, I will be able to prove to you just who is more highly regarded by the crowd of onlookers: you will see that I am bought by the connoisseur at a very high price indeed, while you will be sold to an undiscriminating commoner for a mere penny or two!’

NOTE: Avianus simply refers to the freshwater fish as *piscis*, fish. As for the saltwater fish, *phukis*, it is not entirely clear what species he had in mind: Greek sources suggest it is some kind of wrasse, although Pliny (*Natural History* 9.26) seems to think it is a lamprey.

Fable 191 (Avianus 40 = Perry 12)

The Leopard and the Fox

The leopard, renowned for his spots and the fine fur of his chest, went out into the fields together with the other animals. As the coats of the mighty lions were all one colour, the leopard quickly concluded that the lions must be a wretched species indeed.

Scorning the rest of the animals for their slovenly appearance, the leopard considered himself to be the only true example of nobility among them. As the leopard was rejoicing in the novelty of his apparel, the sly fox criticized him sharply and showed how useless his markings were. ‘Go ahead and put your faith in the excessive embellishment of your youth,’ said the fox, ‘so long as my intelligence is more attractive than yours: after all, mental endowments are more impressive than the glamour of good looks!’

NOTE: There is a version of this story in Plutarch, *Passions of the Soul* I and likewise in *The Banquet of the Seven Sages* 12.

Fable 192 (Syntipas 3 = Perry 229)

The Raven, the Swallow, and the Seasons

The swallow and the raven were quarrelling with each other about who was more beautiful. The raven said to the swallow, ‘Your beauty is seen only in the springtime, and when winter comes it cannot hold out against the cold. My physique, on the other hand, holds up admirably both during the cold of winter and the summer heat.’

This fable shows that the strength and well-being of the body are superior to physical beauty or the charms of youth.

NOTE: For another dispute between the swallow and a raven, see Fable 213; for the proverbial association of the swallow and the springtime, see Fable 274.

Fable 193 (Babrius 65 = Perry 294)

The Crane and the Peacock

The peacock kept waving his golden feathers back and forth while he argued with the grey-winged crane. The crane finally exclaimed, 'You may make fun of the colour of my wings, but I can rise on them up to the stars and high into the sky. You, on the other hand, can only flap those gilded feathers of yours down there on the ground, just like a rooster. You are never seen soaring up high in the sky!'

I would prefer to be admired while dressed in my well-worn clothes than to live without honour, no matter how fine my clothes might be.

Fable 194 (Chambry 302* = Perry 202)

The Dove and the Crow

A dove who lived in a certain dovecote was boasting about the number of children she had given birth to. The crow heard her and said, 'Stop your bragging! The more children you have, the greater the slavery you bring into the world!'

The fable shows that the most unfortunate house slaves are the ones who give birth to children in captivity.

Fable 195 (Chambry 194* = Perry 257)

The Sow and the Lioness

The story goes that a sow who had delivered a whole litter of piglets loudly accosted a lioness. ‘How many children do you breed?’ asked the sow. ‘I breed only one,’ said the lioness, ‘but he is very well bred!’

The fable shows that a single man who is remarkable for physical strength and bravery and wisdom is mightier than many weak and foolish people.

NOTE: Other versions of this fable (included in Chambry’s first edition of the Greek fables) feature a fox, not a sow, debating with the lioness.

Fable 196 (Chambry 342* = Perry 223)

The Sow, the Dog, and Their Litters

A sow and a dog were arguing about their litters. The dog said that she had the easiest delivery of all the four-footed animals but the sow responded, ‘Be that as it may, the puppies you give birth to are blind!’

The fable shows that an enterprise is not to be judged in terms of its speed but its outcome.

NOTE: The dog’s blind puppies were proverbial in Greek: ‘the dog gives birth in a hurry but her pups are born blind’ (Erasmus, *Adages* 2.2.35).

Fable 197 (Chambry 329 = Perry 222)

The Dog, the Sow, and Aphrodite

A sow and a dog were viciously arguing with one another. The sow, for her part, swore by Aphrodite that she would tear the dog to pieces with her teeth. The dog replied ironically, ‘Yes indeed, you do well to swear by Aphrodite! It’s clear just how much she loves you, since she absolutely forbids anyone who has tasted your filthy flesh to enter her temple.’ The sow retorted, ‘This is even more evidence of the goddess’s love for me, since she turns away anyone who has slain or mistreated me in any way. As for you, you just smell bad, dead or alive!’

This story shows how a discerning speaker can deftly turn the insults of his enemies into compliments.

NOTE: Aphrodite supposedly hated pigs because her lover, Adonis, had been killed by a wild boar. The Greek proverb ‘he sacrificed a pig to Aphrodite’ (Erasmus, *Adages* 3.1.30) was used to refer to someone who gave an inappropriate or unwanted gift.

Fable 198 (Phaedrus 4.25 = Perry 521)

The Ant and the Fly

The ant and the fly were bitterly arguing about who was more important. The fly presented her case first. ‘Do you really mean to compare yourself to my exalted status? I pass my time among the altars, I wander through the temples of the gods; whenever there is a sacrifice, I am the first to taste all the entrails; I can sit on the

head of the king if I want and I enjoy the forbidden kisses of all the married women; I do not work and yet I reap the very best of all the spoils. What has life given you that can compare with all that I have, you country bumpkin?' The ant replied, 'It is truly a wonderful thing to dine at the gods' table, but only for someone whom the gods have invited, not for someone whom they hate. You say that you frequent their altars? Agreed, but you are driven away as soon as you arrive. As for the kings you mention and the women's kisses, you are boasting about something that it is shameful to mention. Moreover, if you do no work then it is no surprise that you have nothing at hand when you need it. I, on the other hand, assiduously gather a store of grain for the winter, while I see you feeding on manure piled up against the walls. Later on, when the cold winds make you shrivel up and die, I am safe and at peace in my well-furnished abode. Now that it is summer you try to provoke me, but in winter you have nothing to say. That should be enough to take the edge off your pride.'

This sort of fable shows how to recognize those people who extol themselves for empty deeds and those whose noble qualities are marked by solid accomplishments.

NOTE: There is a line at the beginning of this fable which most editors treat as spurious. It reads: 'This fable tells us not to engage in useless activities.' For another fable about the industrious ant, see Fable 126.

Fable 199 (Phaedrus *App.* 31 = Perry 556)

The Wasp and the Butterfly

A butterfly noticed a wasp flying by and exclaimed, ‘What an unfair turn of events this is! In our previous lifetimes, when we inhabited the bodies from whose mortal remains we received our souls, I was the one who spoke eloquently in times of peace and fought bravely in war, and I was first among my fellows in all of the arts! Yet look at me now, an utter frivolity, crumbling into ashes as I flutter here and there. You, on the other hand, were formerly a mule, a beast of burden, yet now you stab and wound anyone you want with your sting.’ The wasp then uttered words that are worth repeating: ‘It does not matter what we used to be: the important thing is what we are now!’

NOTE: This fable derives from the ancient belief that wasps would spring from the carcass of a dead mule or horse (e.g. Aelian, *Characteristics of Animals* 1.28), while a spirit or ‘psyche’ would take shape in the form of a butterfly (Aristotle, *History of Animals* 551[a]).

DEBATES AMONG THE PLANTS

Fable 200 (Babrius 64 = Perry 304)

The Fir Tree and the Bramble Bush

The fir tree and the bramble bush were quarrelling with one another. The fir tree sang her own praises at length. ‘I am beautiful

and attractively tall. I grow straight up, a neighbour to the clouds. I supply the hall's roof and the ship's keel. How can you compare yourself, you mere thorn, to such a tree as myself?' The bramble bush then said to the tree, 'Just remember the axes which are always chopping away at you! Then even you can understand that it is better to be a bramble bush.'

A famous man has more glory than lesser people, but he is also exposed to greater dangers.

Fable 201 (Chambry 324* = Perry 213)

The Trees and the Bramble Bush

The pomegranate and the apple tree were debating about their beauty. They had both gone on at great length arguing back and forth when a bramble bush in a nearby hedge heard them and said, 'Dear friends, let us put a stop to our quarrel.'

The fable shows that when there is a dispute among sophisticated people, then riff-raff also try to act important.

> NOTE: For a similar story about a crab who gets involved in a dispute between dolphins and whales, see Fable 220. Other versions of this fable include the olive tree amongst the disputants (for an elaborate debate between the laurel and the olive, see Callimachus, *Iamb*. 4 = Perry 439).

Fable 202 (Aphthonius 36 = Perry 70)

The Oak Tree and the Reed

A story about a reed and an oak, urging us not to rely on strength.

A reed got into an argument with an oak tree. The oak tree marvelled at her own strength, boasting that she could stand her own in a battle against the winds. Meanwhile, she condemned the reed for being weak, since he was naturally inclined to yield to every breeze. The wind then began to blow very fiercely. The oak tree was torn up by her roots and toppled over, while the reed was left bent but unharmed.

Those who adapt to the times will emerge unscathed.

Fable 203 (Syntipas 31 = Perry 413)

The Olive Tree and the Fig Tree

When a fig tree lost all her leaves during the winter, a nearby olive tree made fun of her nakedness. ‘In both winter and summer,’ the olive tree said, ‘I am beautifully adorned with leaves, ever green with new life, whereas your beauty lasts only as long as the summer.’ While the olive tree was boasting, a thunderbolt suddenly fell from the sky and burned her to cinders, while the fig tree stood there safe and sound.

The fable shows that people who boast of their wealth or their fortune can meet with unexpected disaster.

NOTE: In Aphthonius 22, it is a snowstorm that destroys the olive tree: the snow gets caught in its leaves and breaks off the

branches.

Fable 204 (Chambry 323 = Perry 369)

The Rose and the Amaranth

An amaranth plant, whose flower never fades, had sprung up next to a rosebush. The amaranth said, ‘What a delightful flower you are! You are desired by the gods and mortals alike. I congratulate you on your beauty and your fragrance.’ The rose said, ‘O amaranth, everlasting flower, I live for only a brief time and even if no one plucks me, I die, while you are able to blossom and bloom with eternal youth!’

This fable shows that it is better to last for a long time while being contented with little than to live sumptuously for a short time and then suffer a reversal of fortune, perhaps even death.

NOTE: The Greek word ‘amaranth’ means ‘undying’. It is not clear to what plant the Greek word might have referred; it could even have been a poetic invention. In modern times, the name amaranth has been given to a genus of plants commonly known as African spinach or Indian spinach.

Fable 205 (Phaedrus 3.17 = Perry 508)

The Gods and Their Trees

Once upon a time, the gods selected the trees which they wished to adopt as their own. Jupiter chose the oak tree, while Venus

preferred the myrtle tree, Apollo the laurel, and Cybebe the pine, while Hercules chose the lofty poplar. Minerva was surprised and asked them why they had chosen trees which bore no fruit. Jupiter explained, 'We do not want to appear to bestow these honours on the trees as if in exchange for their fruit.' 'For Heaven's sake,' said Minerva, 'you can say whatever you want, but the olive tree appeals to me precisely because of the fruit that it yields!' Then the father of gods and begetter of mortals said, 'O my daughter, you are rightly called the goddess of wisdom by one and all: public acclaim is sheer foolishness, unless we are able to produce something that is useful.'

This fable warns us not to do anything that doesn't have some purpose.

NOTE: Venus is the Roman equivalent of Aphrodite, the goddess of love; Minerva is the Roman equivalent of Athena, goddess of wisdom; Hercules is the Roman equivalent of Heracles. For Cybebe, the 'Great Mother' goddess, see Fable 6 and its note.

FABLES ABOUT BOASTING

Fable 206 (Babrius 62 = Perry 315)

The Boastful Mule

A mule once happened to be eating the food of idleness in his manger. Feeling his oats, so to speak, he burst into a run, whinnying and shaking his head to and fro. 'My mother is a horse,' he shouted, 'and I am no worse at racing than she is!' But suddenly he drew to a

halt and hung his head in shame, remembering that his father was only a donkey.

NOTE: In Plutarch, *Banquet of the Seven Sages* 4, Aesop tells this same story about a 'Lydian mule' who began boasting when he saw his reflection in the water.

Fable 207 (Avianus 41 = Perry 368)

The Clay Pot and the Rain

Driven by the winds and a heavy build-up of clouds, a great thunderstorm erupted in a downpour of winter rain. The gale let loose its flood, drowning the land with water and drenching the work of a potter that had been placed out in the fields (exposure to warm air begins the process of fixing the softness of the clay, preparing it to be properly baked when it is set in the fire). The storm cloud asked the fragile pot by what name she was called. Heedless of what was going on around her, the pot replied, 'My name is Amphora, and my gently sloping sides were designed by the potter's skilful hand, aided by his swiftly spinning wheel.' The cloud replied, 'So far you have managed to retain that form of yours, but a deluge of rain is about to come down and wash you away.' At that very moment the flood waters violently shattered the pot and she cracked and split into pieces, plunging headlong into the watery stream. Unhappy creature: she claimed to have a lofty name and dared to address the thunderclouds who were able to launch such arrows of rain!

This illustrative fable will serve to warn poor people not to lament their fate when it rests in the hands of the high and the mighty.

NOTE: In Caxton (7.26), it is not the river but the wind which shatters the pot. When the pot calls herself an ‘amphora’, she is claiming to be a quite superior vessel (Horace, *Ars Poetica* 21–2, contrasts the noble amphora with a lowly pot or pitcher).

Fable 208 (Chambry 320 = Perry 368)

The Cowhide and the River

The river saw that a cowhide was being swept along by his current, so he said to her, ‘What is your name?’ The cowhide answered, ‘They call me “Tough”;.’ Splashing the hide with his waves, the river said, ‘You had better get yourself another name, since I am going to soften you up!’

This fable shows that life’s disasters can often bring boastful and presumptuous people back down to earth.

Fable 209 (Chambry 51* = Perry 33)

The Boastful Athlete

There was a man who had been away on a journey and had then come back home. He strutted about town, talking loudly and at great length about the brave deeds he had accomplished in the various lands he had visited. In Rhodes, the man said, he had jumped such a long jump that no man alive could equal it, and he

claimed that there were witnesses who could back up his story. A bystander then remarked, ‘All right! If you’re telling the truth, here is your Rhodes: go on and jump!’

The fable shows that talking is a waste of time when you can simply provide a demonstration.

NOTE: This fable enjoyed popularity as a Latin proverb: ‘Here’s your Rhodes, jump!’ (Erasmus, *Adages* 3.3.28).

Fable 210 (Phaedrus *App.* 13 = Perry 541)

Aesop and the Athlete

Aesop, that wise man from Phrygia, once saw a winning athlete who was making extravagant boasts, so he asked whether the man’s opponent had been more powerfully built. The athlete replied, ‘Watch what you’re saying! I was much stronger than he was.’ ‘You fool!’ said Aesop. ‘What kind of prize do you deserve if you were the stronger athlete and simply triumphed over an inferior opponent? You might have earned my grudging admiration if your opponent had in fact been superior to you in strength, so that you had to defeat him by means of your exceptional athletic prowess.’

Fable 211 (Babrius 114 = Perry 349)

The Boastful Lamp

There was a lamp drunk on his own oil who boasted one evening to everyone present that he was brighter than the Morning Star and

that his splendour shone more conspicuously than anything else in the world. A sudden puff of wind blew in the lamp's direction, and its breath extinguished his light. A man lit the lamp once again and said to him, 'Shine, lamp, and be silent! The splendour of the stars is not ever extinguished.'

Fable 212 (Babrius 104 = Perry 332)

The Dog and His Bell

There was a dog who used to sneak up and bite people. His master forged a bell for the dog and tied it onto him so that everyone would know when he was coming. The dog then paraded about the marketplace, shaking his bell back and forth. An old dog said to him, 'You wretched creature! Why are you so proud of yourself? This is not a decoration for bravery or good behaviour. You are shamefully beating the drum of your own evil deeds!'

> NOTE: It is typically an older, wiser animal who gives the other animals advice that can save them from disaster (see Fable 31 for a wise old ram, Fable 248 for a wise old hare, etc.). This notion was itself proverbial: 'The old deer will recognize the snare from a distance' (Ovid, *Art of Love* 1.766).

Fable 213 (Chambry 350* = Perry 377)

The Crow and the Boastful Swallow

The swallow boasted to the crow, ‘I am a fair young maiden and the daughter of the King of Athens!’ The swallow then proceeded to tell the story of Tereus and how she had been raped by him and how he had cut out her tongue. The crow said to her, ‘If you talk so much with your tongue cut out, what would you do if it had been left intact!’

NOTE: This fable alludes to the famous mythological tale of Procne and Philomela, the daughters of Pandion, king of Athens (see Fable 505). When Procne’s husband, Tereus, raped her sister, Philomela, he then cut out her tongue so that she would not be able to denounce him. One version of the legend says that Philomela was then turned into a swallow, while Procne became a nightingale and Tereus became a hoopoe.

Fable 214 (Babrius 135 = Perry 244)

The Weasel and the Partridge

A man bought a partridge and let him run loose in the house, since he liked the bird very much. The partridge immediately started squawking his usual song, sauntering through every room in the house until he finally perched himself on the steps. Meanwhile, the tricky weasel rushed upon the partridge, asking, ‘Who are you? Where have you come from?’ The partridge replied, ‘The master bought me just today; I am a partridge.’ The weasel said, ‘Well, I have lived here a long time! My mother, the mouser-slayer, gave birth to me in this very house. Yet I keep quiet and sleep beside the

hearth. What gives you the right to speak so freely and cackle so loudly if you have only just now become a member of the household?'

NOTE: In the Greek prose version of this fable (Chambry 355), the bird is a parrot, and retorts to the weasel that the master prefers his voice to hers.

Fable 215 (Babrius 37 = Perry 300)

The Bull and the Bullock

There was a bullock who had been turned loose in the fields without ever having borne the burden of the yoke. When he saw a hardworking bull who was pulling a plough, the bullock said to him, 'You poor thing! What a lot of hard work you have to endure!' The bull made no reply and continued pulling the plough. Later on, when the people were about to make a sacrifice to the gods, the old bull was unyoked and led out to pasture, while the young bullock who had never done any work was dragged away by a rope that they had tied to his horns. Seeing that the young bullock was doomed to pour his blood out upon the altar, the old bull then said to him, 'This is the reason why you were not required to do any work. Although you are young, you are setting out on this journey ahead of your elders: you are going to be sacrificed, and your neck is going to chafe not under the yoke, but under the axe!'

NOTE: In the version found in Avianus 36, there is an especially pessimistic epimythium: ‘This is the fate of mankind: death comes quickly to those who are happy, while death is denied every day to the wretched.’

FABLES ABOUT SELF-IMPORTANT CREATURES

Fable 216 (Phaedrus 1.29 = Perry 484)

The Donkey and the Wild Boar

When a foolish person just wants to get a laugh, he often teases someone in a way that is actually quite insulting, thus getting himself into serious trouble indeed.

A donkey happened to run into a wild boar and greeted him, ‘Good day, brother.’ The boar was indignant and, spurning the donkey’s salutation, he demanded to know how the donkey could make such an outrageous claim. The donkey extended his prick and said, ‘Even if you deny that you have anything in common with me, this certainly seems to have a great deal in common with your snout.’ Although he wanted to launch an attack that would be worthy of his breeding, the boar checked his rage and said, ‘I could easily avenge myself, but I don’t want to sully myself with the blood of this worthless coward!’

NOTE: Caxton (1.11) tells the fable of a donkey and a lion, not a boar. In the medieval Latin tradition, the donkey’s *pene*, ‘prick’, is

confused with his *pede*, 'foot' (e.g. Ademar 12, 'the donkey stuck out his foot and showed him his hoof').

Fable 217 (Phaedrus 1.11 = Perry 151)

The Donkey and the Lion Go Hunting

By boasting about his prowess, the coward is able to fool strangers but he remains a laughing-stock to all who know him.

A lion chose a donkey as his hunting companion and hid him in the bushes, ordering the donkey to frighten the wild animals with his unfamiliar voice while the lion ambushed them as they fled. Following the lion's instructions, our long-eared friend immediately began to bray with all his might. The animals were startled by this strange and amazing sound and they ran in terror toward their familiar hiding-places, thus falling victim to the lion's violent attack. When the lion was exhausted by the slaughter, he summoned the donkey and told him to be quiet. The insolent creature then said to the lion, 'And what did you think of my vocalizing efforts?' 'Truly remarkable', said the lion. 'In fact, if I didn't know already that you were a donkey born and bred, I also would have fled in fear.'

NOTE: For a similar dialogue between the fox and the donkey, see Fable 322.

Fable 218 (Babrius 55 = Perry 292)

The Donkey and the Ox

A man had just one ox, so he yoked the ox together with a donkey and started to plough. It was a humiliating arrangement, but unavoidable. When the work was finished and the man was about to unyoke them, the donkey asked the ox, ‘Who do you think is going to carry the old man’s tools on his back?’ The ox said to the donkey, ‘The same one who always carries them!’

Fable 219 (Phaedrus 5.9 = Perry 531)

The Bull and the Calf

A bull was struggling to squeeze his horns through a narrow entryway, scarcely able to get inside his stable. A young calf then took it upon himself to tell the bull which way he should turn his head. ‘Hush,’ said the bull, ‘I’ve known how to do this since before you were born!’

The person who tries to correct his superiors will recognize himself in this fable.

Fable 220 (Babrius 39 = Perry 62)

The Dolphins and the Whales

The dolphins were always at war with the whales. A crab came forward to mediate between them, as if someone without any public reputation could bring about a peace between warring kings!

NOTE: For a bramble bush who makes the same foolish gesture, see Fable 201.

Fable 221 (Babrius 96 = Perry 98)

The Ram and the Wolf

A wolf was walking by a wall, while a ram was peeping over the top, making all kinds of rude remarks. The wolf, gnashing his teeth, replied, 'It is only your situation that makes these insults possible. You yourself have nothing to boast about!'

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: 'This fable rightly tells us all that no one should boast when his prowess is a matter of mere circumstance.'

Fable 222 (Syntipas 17 = Perry 409)

The Fox and the Lion in a Cage

A fox saw a lion that had been imprisoned in a cage. The fox approached the lion and insulted him very rudely. The lion then said to her, 'You are not responsible for my disgrace; the cause is my unfortunate situation.'

The fable shows that, after suffering a reversal of fortune, powerful people are often humiliated by mere riffraff.

NOTE: For the lion who is humiliated in his old age, see Fable 422.

Fable 223 (Phaedrus 3.6 = Perry 498)

The Fly and the Mule

A fly alighted on a wagon pole and began to harass the mule. ‘You are moving so slowly!’ she said. ‘Can’t you walk any faster than this? Watch out, or I will pierce your neck with my sting!’ The mule replied, ‘I don’t care what you say: the only thing that scares me is that man who sits up there in front, regulating my pace with his pliant whip and keeping my head in check with the foaming bit. I’ve had enough of you and your silly boasting: I know full well when I am supposed to go slowly and when I am supposed to run!’

This fable can be effectively used to ridicule a person who makes empty threats without having the power to back them up.

Fable 224 (Ademar 60 = Perry 137)

The Gnat and the Camel

A gnat happened to land on the back of a camel and lingered there on top of the baggage. When he finally decided to disembark, he said, ‘I will let myself down now as fast as I can so as not to burden you any longer, weighed down as you are.’ ‘Much obliged,’ said the camel, ‘but I was not even aware that you had landed, and your departure is not going to lighten my load.’

If you pay no attention to rank and try to rival your superiors, you will earn our scorn.

NOTE: The Greek versions of this fable are about a gnat and a bull, not a camel.

Fable 225 (Babrius 52 = Perry 45)

The Bulls and the Wagon

Four strong bulls were straining with their shoulders to pull a wagon into town, while the wagon kept on creaking. The driver was filled with rage and leaned down next to the wagon, speaking in a voice loud enough to be heard, ‘You vile creature, why are you raising such a ruckus? Those who are carrying you on their shoulders aren’t making a sound!’

> NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: ‘Bad people are in the habit of weeping and wailing when others are working, just as if they were also exerting themselves.’

Fable 226 (Chambry 358 = Perry 273)

The Flea and the Ox

A flea once asked an ox, ‘Given that you are so exceedingly large and strong, why do you suffer this enslavement to people day after day? Look at me: I lacerate their flesh without pity, drinking great gulps of their blood!’ The ox said, ‘I cannot help but be grateful to the human race, since I am cherished and loved by them to an extraordinary degree, and they often rub my forehead and shoulders.’ The flea admitted, ‘Woe is me! This rubbing of which you are so fond is the worst thing that can happen to me: when they do that, I die.’

This fable shows that braggarts can be easily exposed.

Fable 227 (pseudo-Dositheus, *Hermeneumata* = Perry 391)

The Sailors and the Stones

While making a trip by sea, a certain well-to-do gentleman grew frustrated with the bad weather. As the sailors were rowing less strenuously on account of the weather, the man said to them, 'Hey you, if you don't make this ship go any faster, I will pelt you with stones!' One of the sailors then said to the man, 'I just wish we were somewhere where you could find stones to throw!'

That is how life is: we must put up with less serious losses in order to avoid worse ones.

FABLES ABOUT OVER-CONFIDENT CREATURES

Fable 228 (Chambry 187* = Perry 132)

The Dog and the Lion

A dog was chasing a lion with all his might when the lion turned around and roared at him. The dog abandoned his pursuit, turned tail, and ran. A fox happened to see the dog and said, 'Why on earth would you chase after something when you cannot even stand the sound of its voice?'

It is a foolish man who wants to rival his superiors. He is doomed to fail, and becomes a laughing-stock as well.

Fable 229 (Syntipas 12 = Perry 49)

The Shepherd and the Lion

A shepherd had lost one of his sheep and begged the god for help. The man vowed that if he succeeded in finding the sheep, he would offer up another sheep to the god as a sacrifice. As he wandered about, he saw the carcass of the missing sheep chewed to pieces by a lion, and then the man began to pray, 'O god, if I can just escape the threat of this wild animal, I will offer up yet another sheep as ransom for my life!'

This fable shows that each man holds his own life dearer than any amount of wealth or profit.

> NOTE: For another fable about being careful what you pray for, see Fable 462.

Fable 230 (Babrius 92 = Perry 326)

The Hunter and the Lion

A not very brave hunter was following the tracks of a lion in the deep dark woods of the mountain. When he came across a woodcutter near a large pine tree he asked, 'In the name of the nymphs, have you noticed the tracks of a lion lurking in these parts?' The woodcutter replied, 'The gods must be with you! You have come in the nick of time: I can show you the lion himself at this very moment.' The hunter turned pale and his teeth began to chatter. 'It is very kind of you to do so much more than I asked,'

said the hunter. ‘Let’s talk about the tracks, but please, don’t show me the lion!’

Fable 231 (Syntipas 19 = Perry 406)

The Dogs and the Lion Skin

Some dogs found a lion’s skin and were tearing it to shreds, when a fox saw them and said, ‘If that lion were still among the living, you would see that his claws are stronger than your teeth!’

This fable is for people who attack a man of renown when he has fallen from his position of power and glory.

NOTE: Compare the biblical proverb, ‘A living dog is better than a dead lion’ (Ecclesiastes 9: 4).

Fable 232 (Syntipas 38 = Perry 407)

The Wolf and the Dog in Pursuit

As he chased after a wolf, the dog capered with pleasure at how quickly he was able to run, revelling in his own strength. In fact, the dog actually imagined that the wolf was running away from him because of his superior prowess. But then the wolf turned around and said to the dog, ‘I am not running away from you! I’m just afraid of being chased down by your master.’

The fable shows that you should not take pride in the good qualities that actually belong to someone else.

Fable 233 (Syntipas 40 = Perry 217)

The Bull and the Goats

A bull who was running away from a lion sought refuge in a cave. He found that there were already some wild goats in the cave, and the goats actually started to butt at the bull with their horns. The bull said to them, 'I am not afraid of you! It is the one outside the cave who scares me.'

The fable shows that when you are besieged by powerful people, you are subject to vicious attacks by anyone and everyone.

Fable 234 (Romulus 4.16 = Perry 578)

The Horse and the Goats

Sometimes lesser folk are accustomed to speak disparagingly to one another about their superiors; listen to a fable on this topic.

There were three goats who saw a terrified horse running away from a lion. The goats made fun of the horse, and the horse replied, 'O you hopeless fools, if only you knew who was chasing me! Then you would be just as terrified as I am.'

People with excellent qualities are often insulted by their inferiors.

> NOTE: In Steinhowel (4.14), the fable is about three smaller goats who make fun of a larger goat who is running from a lion, while in Caxton (4.14) the story concerns 'thre lytyll hedgehogges | whiche mocked a grete hedgehogge | whiche fled by fore a wulf'.

Fable 235 (Chambry 269* = Perry 82)

The Lion, the Rooster, and the Donkey

A donkey and a rooster lived together on a farm. A lion who had noticed the donkey crept up and was about to pounce when the rooster let loose a squawk. This frightened the lion (for they say that lions are terrified of the rooster's crowing) and he turned tail and ran. The donkey was elated by the thought of the lion, running away from a rooster. He took off in pursuit of the lion but when the donkey had gone some distance away from the farm, the lion turned around and ate him.

The same thing happens to people: when someone sees his enemies humbled, he becomes presumptuous, and this makes it possible for his enemies to destroy him before he even realizes what is happening.

NOTE: For another story about the lion's fear of the rooster, see Fable 247.

Fable 236 (Odo 39 = Perry 605)

The Fox and the Cat

Against lawyers and the like.

The fox ran into the cat and asked, 'How many tricks and dodges do you know?' The cat replied, 'Actually, I don't know more than one.' The fox then asked the cat, 'What trick is that?' The cat said, 'When the dogs are chasing me, I know how to climb trees and escape.' The cat then asked the fox, 'And how many tricks do you know?' The fox

said, ‘I know seventeen, and that gives me a full bag of tricks! Come with me, and I’ll show you my tricks so that the dogs won’t be able to catch you.’ The cat agreed and the two of them went off together. The hunters began to chase them with their dogs, and the cat said, ‘I hear the dogs; I’m scared.’ The fox replied, ‘Don’t be afraid! I will give you a good lesson in how to get away.’ The dogs and the hunters drew nearer. ‘Well,’ said the cat, ‘I’m going to have to leave you now; I want to do my trick.’ And so the cat jumped up in the tree. The dogs let the cat go and chased the fox until they caught him: one of the dogs grabbed the fox by the leg, another grabbed his belly, another his back, another his head. The cat, who was sitting up high in the tree, shouted, ‘Fox! Fox! Open up your bag of tricks! Even so, I’m afraid all of them put together are not going to save you from the hands and teeth of those demons!’

NOTE: Compare the Greek proverb in Archilochus, *c*.650 BCE: ‘The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one great thing’ (frag. 201 West).

FABLES ABOUT THE UNDERDOG

Fable 237 (Chambry 352* = Perry 226)

The Tortoise and the Hare

The hare laughed at the tortoise’s feet but the tortoise declared, ‘I will beat you in a race!’ The hare replied, ‘Those are just words. Race with me, and you’ll see! Who will mark out the track and serve

as our umpire?' 'The fox,' replied the tortoise, 'since she is honest and highly intelligent.' When the time for the race had been decided upon, the tortoise did not delay, but immediately took off down the race-course. The hare, however, lay down to take a nap, confident in the speed of his feet. Then, when the hare eventually made his way to the finish line, he found that the tortoise had already won.

The story shows that many people have good natural abilities which are ruined by idleness; on the other hand, sobriety, zeal, and perseverance can prevail over indolence.

Fable 238 (Plutarch, *Political Precepts* 12.806e = Perry 434)

The Eagle and the Wren

Aesop's wren was carried along on the shoulders of the eagle; then all of a sudden he flew off and beat the eagle to the finish line.

Fable 239 (Achaeus)

The Eagle and the Tortoise

So the swift was undone by the weaker, just as the eagle was undone by the tortoise.

NOTE: Like the lions rebuking the hares (see Fable 21), this is not a complete fable but only an allusion to a fable preserved in a fragment of Achaeus, a Greek playwright of the fifth century BCE. None of the traditional collections of Aesopica include this allusion to a fable, although it is listed as a fable by van Dijk

(15A1). Without a full account of the fable, we will never know just how the tortoise got the better of the eagle, although the reference to the eagle's swiftness suggests the possibility of some sort of race.

Fable 240 (Babrius 4 = Perry 282)

The Fisherman and the Fish

A fisherman was pulling in the net which he had just cast and, as luck would have it, the net was filled with all kinds of sea creatures. The little fish escaped to the bottom of the net and slipped out through its many holes, but the big fish was caught and lay stretched out flat aboard the boat.

To be small is a way to stay safe and avoid problems, whereas you rarely see a man with a big reputation who is able to keep out of danger.

Fable 241 (Babrius 112 = Perry 353)

The Bull and the Mouse

A bull was bitten by a mouse. Smarting from the sting, the bull began to chase the mouse but the mouse was too quick for him and managed to hide in the depths of his mouse-hole. The bull came to a halt and dug his horns into the wall until finally he sank down in exhaustion and went to sleep right there in front of the hole. The mouse peeped out from inside his hole, crept up on the bull, bit him again, and ran back inside his hole. The bull leaped to his feet but he had no idea what to do. 'It's not always the big one who has the

power,' said the mouse. 'In some cases being humble and small is a strength!'

Fable 242 (Ademar 36 = Perry 564)

The Gnat and the Bull

When a gnat had challenged a bull to see who was the stronger of the two, all the people came to watch the show. Then the little gnat said to the bull, 'It's enough for me that you have accepted my challenge. This makes me your equal: you yourself have admitted as much!' The gnat then rose into the air on his light wings and sported for the crowd, ignoring the threats of the bull. If the bull had been mindful of his own mighty bulk, he would have dismissed this opponent as beneath contempt and the impertinent creature would not have had anything to boast about.

People who enter into contests with unworthy opponents lower their own reputation.

NOTE: For a similar story with a quite different conclusion, see Fable 243 (following).

Fable 243 (Chambry 188 = Perry 255)

The Gnat and the Lion

A gnat came to the lion and said, 'I am not afraid of you and you are not more powerful than me. You don't agree? Well, what kind of power do you have? The fact that you can scratch with your claws

and bite with your teeth? That's the sort of thing even a woman can do when she is arguing with her husband! I am, in fact, far stronger than you are. If you agree, let's go and fight it out.' The gnat sounded his trumpet and then attacked, biting the lion around the nose where his face was not covered with hair. The lion could only wear himself out with his claws, until he finally admitted defeat. Having emerged victorious in this battle with the lion, the gnat sounded his trumpet and sang his victory ode. He then flew away—only to get entangled in the web of a spider. As he was being eaten by the spider, the gnat bitterly lamented the fact that while he had done battle with the high and mighty, he was about to be killed by such an insignificant creature.

NOTE: There is a version of this story in Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Cleitophon* 2.22.

FABLES ABOUT FEAR

Fable 244 (*Greek Anthology* 6.217 = Perry 436)

The Priest and the Lion

One of the Galli, those priests of the Great Mother Rhea, slipped inside a deserted cave, seeking shelter from the onslaught of a winter storm. Just as the priest was brushing the snow from his hair, a ravenous lion, who was following his trail, burst into the entrance of the cave. The cave offered no other means of escape, but the priest held a huge tambourine in his hand. He struck the instrument

with the flat of his palm and the whole cave resounded with the shattering sound. The wild lion could not endure the awesome clatter of the goddess Cybele, so he raced away and fled into the wooded mountainside, terrified by this effeminate servant of the goddess. The priest then hung up these robes and dedicated these fair locks of hair as an offering to the goddess.

NOTE: The great mother goddess Cybele or Cybebe (who is also referred to by the name Rhea in this poem) was worshipped throughout Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), and her cult then spread to both Greece and Rome. The priests of Cybele, called 'Galli', were famous for their raucous devotional music (see Fable 6 for the Galli and their tambourines). Several other poems in the *Greek Anthology* also depict a priest of Cybele confronting a lion: 6.217, 6.218, 6.220, and 6.237.

Fable 245 (Babrius 82 = Perry 146)

The Lion and the Mouse on His Mane

While a lion was sleeping, a mouse ran over his shaggy mane. This angered the lion and he leaped up from his den, all the hairs of his mane standing on end. A fox made fun of the fact that a lion, king of all the animals, had been startled by a mouse. The lion answered the fox, 'You insolent creature! I was not afraid of the mouse scratching me and running away; I was just worried that he might make a mess on my mane.'

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: ‘Check the bold advances of insolent people at the very outset, no matter how small, and do not allow trivial persons to treat you with disrespect.’

Fable 246 (Babrius 1 = Perry 340)

The Lion and the Archer

A man who was an experienced shot with the bow and arrow went up on the mountain to hunt. All the animals fled from him in fear, except for the lion, who challenged the man to a battle. ‘Wait!’ the man said to the lion. ‘Do not be so quick to think you can defeat me. First you need to get to know my messenger, and then you’ll be able to choose the best course to follow.’ Standing at some distance from the lion, the archer let loose an arrow and the barb buried itself in the soft flesh of the lion’s belly. The lion was terrified and fled into the deserted forest glades. A fox standing nearby urged the lion to be brave and stand his ground, but the lion replied, ‘You are not going to fool me or catch me in your trap: when he sends me such a pointed messenger as this, I already know what a fearful person he himself must be.’

NOTE: Another version of this story (Avianus 17) is about a tiger, rather than a lion.

Fable 247 (Chambry 210 = Perry 259)

The Lion and the Elephant

The lion often found fault with the way he had been designed by Prometheus. Admittedly, Prometheus had made the lion very large and handsome, supplying him with sharp fangs in his jaw and arming him with claws on his feet; in short, he had made the lion more powerful than all the other animals. ‘Yet great though I may be,’ said the lion, ‘I am terribly afraid of roosters!’ Prometheus replied, ‘Why waste your time blaming me? You have every good quality that I was able to create, and you are afraid of absolutely nothing, except for roosters.’ The lion kept on lamenting his condition, criticizing himself for being a coward until finally he just wanted to die. It was when he was in this frame of mind that the lion ran into the elephant. The lion greeted the elephant, and stopped to converse with him. When he saw that the elephant kept on flapping his ears, the lion enquired, ‘What’s the matter with you? Why do you keep on flapping your ears like that?’ As the elephant began to speak, a gnat came whizzing by and the elephant said, ‘Do you see this little thing, this little buzzing thing? If it gets inside my ear, I’m doomed.’ ‘Well then,’ the lion concluded, ‘why should I die of shame? I am an excellent creature indeed, and in much better shape than this elephant: roosters are more formidable than gnats, after all!’

You see what strength a gnat must have, given that he provokes fear in the elephant.

NOTE: This fable is also found in Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Cleitophon* 2.21. The lion’s fear of the rooster was a popular Greek

and Roman legend; see, for example, Lucretius (*The Nature of Things* 4.710), who states that the rooster emits a painful substance that gets into the lion's eyes, although for some reason this substance does not penetrate the eyes of other creatures in the same way. For another story about the lion's fear of the rooster, see Fable 235.

Fable 248 (Aphthonius 23 = Perry 138)

The Hares and the Frogs

A story about hares meant to comfort unhappy people.

The hares voted to commit suicide, and once they had resolved to die, they had only to decide on the location. The hares concluded that the pond would be an appropriate place, so they headed off in that direction, planning to take their own lives. The frogs who lived on the banks of the pond could not endure the thumping of the hares' approach, so they scampered into their hiding-places beneath the water. One of the older hares saw them and said, 'Overturn this vote in favour of death! Look: there are actually creatures who are even more cowardly than we are!'

Unhappy people are comforted by the sight of someone who is worse off than they are.

NOTE: Hares were the proverbial cowards of ancient Greece. The phrase 'a hare's life' was used to indicate someone who lived in a state of constant fear (e.g. Demosthenes, *On The Crown* 263).

Fable 249 (Aphthonius 17 = Perry 351)

The Deer and His Mother

A story about a deer, urging that advice should be given by a person who is also capable of action.

The deer was being lectured by his mother, 'Why do you act this way, my child? You have been naturally endowed with horns, and you are powerfully built, so I cannot understand why you run away at the approach of the dogs.' That is what the mother said. Then, when she heard the sound of the hunting dogs in the distance, she again urged her child to stand firm while she herself took off at a run.

It is easy to advise action which cannot be carried out.

NOTE: Like the hare, the deer was a proverbial coward in Greek (e.g. in Homer, *Iliad* 1.225, Achilles denounces Agamemnon for having 'the heart of a deer').

Fable 250 (Odo 54a = Perry 613)

The Mice, the Cat, and the Bell

There were once some mice who held a meeting about how to defend themselves from the cat. A certain wise mouse said, 'A bell should be tied around the neck of the cat so that we would be able to hear him wherever he goes and have advance warning of his attacks.' They all agreed with this proposal. A mouse then asked, 'Who will tie the bell around the cat's neck?' One mouse answered,

‘Not me, that’s for sure!’ Another answered: ‘Not me either! I wouldn’t so much as go near that cat for anything in the world!’

NOTE: Archibald Douglas, earl of Angus (1449–1514), was nicknamed ‘Bell-the-Cat’ for an incident in 1482: the story goes that the nobles of Scotland had formed a conspiracy against Robert Cochrane, a favourite of James III, and when the question was posed, ‘Who will bell the cat?’, Archibald Douglas shouted, ‘That will I!’ He disposed of Cochrane and later participated in the rebellion that deposed James III in 1488.

Fable 251 (Chambry 47 = Perry 245)

The Coward and the Ravens

A coward was leaving on his way to war. Some ravens cawed at him, so he put his weapons down and stood still. Then he took up his arms once more and proceeded on his way, but the ravens cawed at him again. The coward stopped and finally said, ‘Squawk at me as long as you want: you are still not going to get a bite out of my flesh!’

This is a story for people who are terrible cowards.

NOTE: This story is found in Plutarch, *Life of Phocion* 9.

FABLES ABOUT SELF-DELUSION

Fable 252 (Chambry 156* = Perry 121)

The Musician at Home

There was once a musician who had no talent whatsoever, but he played his lyre in a room that had thick plaster upon the walls so when he heard the echoing sound, he concluded that he must be an excellent musician indeed. Puffed up with pride, he decided to perform on the stage. But when he made his debut at the theatre, his performance was so dreadful that the audience threw stones at him, driving him off the stage.

The fable shows that the same is true of public speakers: while they are still in school they may think that they have some talent, but they find out they are worthless when they embark on a public career.

Fable 253 (Babrius 56 = Perry 364)

The Beauty Contest of the Animals

Zeus had decided to award prizes to the most beautiful animal babies, so he inspected each and every one of them in order to reach a decision. The monkey also participated, claiming to be the mother of a very beautiful baby: a naked, snub-nosed little monkey whom she cradled in her arms. When the gods took a look at that monkey they all started to laugh, but his mother insisted, ‘The winner is for Zeus to decide! But in my eyes this one is the most beautiful of all.’

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: ‘This story has the following meaning for everyone, in my opinion: each person thinks that his own child is beautiful.’ For the beauty contest of the birds, see Fable 329, and for another fable about the monkey and her offspring, see Fable 497.

Fable 254 (Phaedrus *App*. 29 = Perry 555)

The Young Man and the Prostitute

A dishonest prostitute was trying to seduce a young man and he willingly gave himself over to her deceptions, even though she often caused him considerable pain and suffering. The scheming creature would say things like, ‘Although many men vie for my favours with gifts, I value you the most of all.’ Thinking about how often she had tricked him, the young man remarked, ‘I am glad to hear it, my darling—not because I believe you, but because what you say pleases me.’

NOTE: There is a promythium appended to the fable in Perotti’s Appendix: ‘The things which bring us pleasure can often be hazardous as well.’

Fable 255 (Phaedrus 4.3 = Perry 15)

The Fox and the Grapes

Driven by hunger, a fox tried to reach some grapes hanging high on the vine. Although she leaped with all her strength, she couldn’t

manage to reach the grapes. As she went away, the fox remarked, ‘Oh, you aren’t even ripe yet! I don’t need any sour grapes.’

People who speak disparagingly of things that they cannot attain would do well to apply this instructive little story to their own lives.

NOTE: For a version of this fable involving a mouse, see Fable 256 (following).

Fable 256 (Chambry 32* = Perry 15)

The Mouse, the Fox, and the Grapes

A fox saw a cluster of grapes hanging from a trellis and wanted to eat them, but the grapes were too high and she could not find a way to get at them. A mouse saw the fox and grinned as he said, ‘You’ll have to go hungry!’ The fox didn’t want a mouse to have the last word, so she replied, ‘Those grapes are sour!’

The fable indicts wicked people who refuse to listen to reason.

Fable 257 (Syntipas 49 = Perry 402)

The Hunter and the Horseman

There was a hunter who had caught a hare and was carrying it home. As he went along his way, he met a man on horseback who asked him for the hare, pretending that he wanted to buy it. As soon as he got the hare from the hunter, the horseman immediately took off at a gallop. The hunter began to pursue the horseman thinking that he might catch up with him. When the horseman finally

disappeared into the distance, the hunter reluctantly said, ‘Go ahead then! That hare is my gift to you.’

This fable shows that people who involuntarily have their property taken from them often pretend that they made a gift of it voluntarily.

Fable 258 (Syntipas 4 = Perry 412)

The Rivers and the Sea

The rivers came together in order to make a complaint against the sea. They told her, ‘Why is it that we come to you with waters that are sweet and fit to drink, but you change them into something salty and undrinkable?’ In response to the rivers’ criticism, the sea replied, ‘Don’t come, and you won’t get salty!’

This fable depicts people who criticize someone inappropriately even though that person is actually helping them.

Fable 259 (Chambry 326* = Perry 214)

The Mole and the Frankincense

A mole (which is a blind animal) told his mother that he could see. The mother tested him by giving him a grain of frankincense and asking him what it was. He said it was a little pebble, whereupon she exclaimed, ‘My son, in addition to your blindness, you have also lost your sense of smell!’

So too there are certain charlatans who promise incredible things but who are revealed for what they truly are in trivial matters.

NOTE: The mole was proverbial for blindness, as in the Greek saying ‘blinder than a mole’ (e.g. Apostolius 17.35), and also in Latin, ‘you’ve got the eyes of a mole’ (Jerome, *Epistles* 84.7).

Fable 260 (Chambry 326 = Perry 214)

The Mole and the Frankincense

Moles are blind animals. A mole once said to his mother, ‘I see a mulberry, mother!’ Then he said, ‘And I smell incense all around!’ And he spoke a third time and said, ‘And I can hear the sound of a tiny bronze ball.’ His mother then said, ‘My son, now I understand that in addition to lacking sight, you have also lost your sense of hearing and smell!’

The story shows that there are some charlatans who promise incredible things but who are revealed for what they truly are in trivial matters.

NOTE: In this more elaborate version of the preceding fable, the mole provides three distinct impressions of the grain of incense: it looks like a berry, it smells like incense, and it sounds like a little metal ball.

Fable 261 (Chambry 326 = Perry 214)

The Mole and His Mother

The mole is a handicapped animal: he is blind. There was once a mole who wanted to kiss his mother, but instead of pressing up against her mouth, he pressed against her private parts. His brothers

realized what he was doing and one of them remarked, ‘It serves you right! You had great expectations, but you have gone and lost even your sense of smell.’

The story shows that a sinful mind can even change a person’s nature, causing it to be impaired.

NOTE: This bizarre version of the blind mole motif should probably not even be considered the ‘same’ story as the preceding two fables, although they have been inventoried as a single fable by modern editors.

FABLES ABOUT REFLECTIONS AND ILLUSIONS

Fable 262 (Syntipas 15 = Perry 74)

The Stag and His Reflection

A stag had grown thirsty and went to a spring in order to drink some water. When he saw the reflection of his body in the water, he disparaged the slenderness of his legs but revelled in the shape and size of his horns. All of a sudden, some hunters appeared and began to chase him. As the stag ran along the level ground of the plain, he outdistanced his pursuers and beat them to the marsh by the river. Without thinking about what he was doing, the stag kept on going, but his horns became tangled in the overhanging branches and he was captured by the hunters. The stag groaned and said, ‘Woe is me, wretched creature that I am! The thing that I disparaged could have

saved me, while I have been destroyed by the very thing I boasted about.'

This fable shows people should not praise themselves for something unless it is useful and beneficial.

Fable 263 (Syntipas 28 = Perry 133)

The Dog, the Meat, and the Reflection

A dog seized some meat from the butcher shop and ran away with it until he came to a river. When the dog was crossing the river, he saw the reflection of the meat in the water, and it seemed much larger than the meat he was carrying. He dropped his own piece of meat in order to try to snatch at the reflection. When the reflection disappeared, the dog went to grab the meat he had dropped but he was not able to find it anywhere, since a passing raven had immediately snatched the meat and gobbled it up. The dog lamented his sorry condition and said, 'Woe is me! I foolishly abandoned what I had in order to grab hold of a phantom, and thus I ended up losing both that phantom and what I had to begin with.'

This fable is about greedy people who grasp at more than they need.

NOTE: There is a similar story in the Buddhist *Calladhanuggaha-jataka* in which a jackal is crossing a stream carrying a piece of meat in his mouth: when he puts down the meat to try to catch some fish, a vulture steals the meat and the jackal ends up with nothing.

Fable 264 (Romulus Ang. 48 = Perry 669)

The Fox, the Moon, and the River

A fox was out walking one night next to a river. She saw the light of the moon reflected in the water and mistook it for a piece of cheese. The fox started to lap at the water, thinking that if she could drink up all the water, she would find the cheese in the dry riverbed. The fox lapped and lapped at the water until finally she choked and died.

So every greedy man goes chasing after profit with such an intensity that he destroys himself without achieving anything.

NOTE: For the motif of 'drinking the river', see Fable 442. Compare the English proverbial fool: 'hee thinkes the Moone is made of greene cheese' (*Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, *c*.1611).

Fable 265 (Chambry 219 = Perry 260)

The Wolf and His Shadow

There was once a wolf who went wandering in the desert as the sun was sinking and about to set. Seeing his long shadow, the wolf exclaimed, 'Should someone as great as myself be afraid of a lion? I'm a hundred feet tall! Clearly I should be the king of all the animals in the world!' As the wolf was boasting, a mighty lion seized and devoured him. Realizing his mistake after the fact, the wolf exclaimed, 'My self-conceit has been my undoing!'

Fable 266 (Romulus Mon. 32 = Perry 695)

The Goat and His Reflection

It often happens that the weak and the poor try to rebel against the high and mighty. Listen to a fable about such an event.

A wolf was chasing the billy-goat of the herd, intending to capture him. The goat climbed up on a tall cliff where he was safe, so the wolf besieged the goat from the bottom of the cliff. After two or three days, when the wolf had grown hungry and the goat had grown thirsty, they each went away: the wolf left first in order to look for food and then the goat went away to find a drink of water. When he had quenched his thirst, the goat noticed his reflection in the water and said, 'Oh what fine legs I have and what a beautiful beard and what great horns! Just let that wolf try to make me run away: this time I will defend myself! I will not let that wolf have any power over me!' Behind the goat's back, the wolf had been listening in silence to every word the goat said. Then, as he plunged his teeth deep into the goat's flank, the wolf asked, 'What is this you are saying, brother goat?' The goat, when he realized he was trapped, said, 'O my lord wolf, I admit my mistake and beg your forgiveness! After a goat has something to drink, he says things he shouldn't.' But the wolf showed no mercy and devoured the goat.

The fable warns us that weak and poor people should not try to rebel against the high and mighty.

Fable 267 (Plutarch, *Banquet of the Seven Sages* 14.157b = Perry 449)

The Dog in Winter and Summer

It was winter time and the dog was lying all curled up in a ball because of the cold. This made him think about building a house, but when summer came, he was once again able to sleep stretched out at full length. In fact, the dog was so impressed by his own size that he decided not to build himself a house after all, seeing as it would be no small job to make a house big enough to fit him.

NOTE: This same fable is found in Rumi, *Mathnawi* 3.2885 ff.

FABLES ABOUT MISLEADING APPEARANCES

Fable 268 (Chambry 148 = Perry 195)

The Camel and the People

The first time that they saw the camel, the people were afraid and ran away, awestruck by her immense size. Yet as time went by, they recognized the camel's gentle nature and grew bold enough to approach her. Gradually they realized that this was a creature who was incapable of anger. Their contempt for the camel finally reached the point that they placed a bridle on the camel and allowed their children to ride her.

The fable shows that familiarity mollifies even the most terrifying things.

Fable 269 (Chambry 42* = Perry 10)

The Fox and the Lion

The fox had never seen a lion before, so when she happened to meet the lion for the first time she all but died of fright. The second time she saw him, she was still afraid, but not as much as before. The third time, the fox was bold enough to go right up to the lion and speak to him.

The fable shows that familiarity makes it easy to confront even frightening situations.

Fable 270 (Chambry 201* = Perry 141)

The Lion and the Frog

A lion heard a frog croaking loudly and turned towards the sound, thinking that this must be the voice of some huge beast. After a while, the lion saw the frog come up out of the swamp. He went over to the frog and, as he crushed him underfoot, the lion said, 'No one should be worried about a sound before the thing itself has been examined.'

This fable is for a man with a big mouth who talks and talks without accomplishing anything.

NOTE: For another fable about noisy frogs, see Fable 54.

Fable 271 (Aphthonius 4 = Perry 397)

The Bird-catcher and the Cricket

A story about a bird catcher, exhorting us to pay attention to deeds, not words.

A bird-catcher heard a cricket and thought he was going to make a big catch, estimating its size by the volume of its song. But when he walked up and seized his prey, he discovered that it was worthless. The bird-catcher then denounced the whole process of deducing from appearances, since it often leads people to make mistaken judgements.

The fable shows that persons of no value can seem to be greater than they really are.

Fable 272 (Syntipas 62 = Perry 387)

The Man and the Insect

A cicada saw that a man was trying to capture him, so he said, 'Why don't you go and hunt those birds instead? They would actually be useful to you! You don't stand to gain anything by catching me.'

This fable shows that we should not go chasing after things that are useless and unprofitable.

> NOTE: In the *Life of Aesop* (99), Aesop tells a more elaborate version of this story in which the man does eventually let the insect go.

Fable 273 (Phaedrus *App.* 23 = Perry 551)

The Raven and the Traveller

A man was making his way through the countryside off the beaten track when he heard the word ‘Hel-lo!’ He halted for a moment and then, when he saw that there was nobody there, he quickened his pace. Out of nowhere he heard the same greeting a second time. Reassured by the friendly voice, he came to a stop, hoping to meet the person who had spoken to him, whoever it was. The traveller stood there for a while in confusion, when he could have walked another mile or more in the time he spent looking around for the source of the voice. Finally the raven came out into the open, flying overhead and continuing to croak ‘Hel-lo! Hel-lo!’ When the man understood that he had been tricked, he said, ‘Damn you, you worthless bird: you made me slow down when I was really in a hurry!’

NOTE: The Latin *ave ave* (‘ah way! ah way!’) sounds more like the cawing of a raven than does the English ‘hello’.

Fable 274 (Babrius 131 = Perry 169)

The Young Man and the Swallow

There was a young man who had lost all his possessions while gambling. He had only one piece of clothing left to keep him warm until the end of winter (although a throw of the dice was going to take this away from him too). Spring had not yet arrived but a swallow had already appeared, having left her home down in Thebes out of season. When the young man heard the tiny chirping of the swallow, he said, ‘What do I need all this clothing for? That

swallow means spring is just around the corner.' The man then went and joined another game. After just a few rolls of the dice, he lost his only cloak. A snowstorm blew up, accompanied by enough hail to make a body shiver, so that everyone needed an extra layer of clothing. The young man, now naked, peeped out of the doorway and saw the chattering swallow once again, lying dead on the ground like a little sparrow stricken by the cold. 'You miserable creature,' he said, 'I wish I had never laid eyes on you! You deceived yourself, and me as well.'

NOTE: This fable is based on the Greek proverb 'one swallow does not make a spring' (see, for example, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098[a]), much like the English proverb 'one swallow does not make a summer'. The Thebes referred to here is the ancient capital of the Egyptian empire.

Fable 275 (Chambry 311* = Perry 207)

The Shepherd and the Sea

There was a shepherd tending his flocks in a place beside the sea. When he saw that the sea was calm and mild, he decided that he wanted to make a voyage. He sold his flocks and bought some dates which he loaded onto a ship. He then set sail, but a fierce storm blew up and capsized the ship. The shepherd lost everything and barely managed to get to shore. Later on, when the sea had grown calm once again, the shepherd saw a man on the beach praising the

sea for her tranquillity. The shepherd remarked, ‘That’s just because she’s after your dates!’

Fable 276 (Babrius 71 = Perry 168)

The Farmer and the Sea

A farmer saw a ship and her crew about to sink into the sea as the ship’s prow disappeared beneath the curl of a wave. The farmer said, ‘O sea, it would have been better if no one had ever set sail on you! You are a pitiless element of nature and an enemy to mankind.’ When she heard this, the sea took on the shape of a woman and said in reply, ‘Do not spread such evil stories about me! I am not the cause of any of these things that happen to you; the winds to which I am exposed are the cause of them all. If you look at me when the winds are gone, and sail upon me then, you will admit that I am even more gentle than that dry land of yours.’

> NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: ‘This fable shows that the wrong application can often turn things which are useful by nature into something worse, so that they seem to be useless.’

Fable 277 (Chambry 337 = Perry 270)

The Stake and the Wall

A wall who was being gouged by a stake exclaimed, ‘Hey! Why are you making this gash in me, when I never did you any harm?’ The

stake answered, ‘It’s not my fault! Blame the man who is pounding me so hard from behind.’

Fable 278 (Chambry 266* = Perry 182)

The Donkey Who Carried the God

A man had placed a carved image on his donkey and was leading him along. Many people bowed down when they met them along the way. The donkey grew arrogant, thinking that the country-folk were bowing down before him, so he began to leap and prance. As he did so, the donkey almost threw the image of the god from his back. The donkey’s master beat him with a stick and said, ‘You are a donkey carrying a god on your back, but that does not mean you deserve to be worshipped as a god!’

This fable can be used for vulgar people who attribute to themselves the honour that is paid to others.

NOTE: This image was proverbial (e.g. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 160: ‘I am the donkey bearing the divine mysteries’), and provides a comic scene in Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* 8.24, when the donkey Lucius is travelling with the priests of Cybele, bearing the goddess’s image on his back. For another donkey in the service of these priests, see Fable 6.

FABLES ABOUT FOOLISH EXPECTATIONS

Fable 279 (Chambry 258* = Perry 177)

The Piece of Driftwood

Some men were making their way along the beach and reached a lookout point. From there, they could see a piece of driftwood floating far off in the distance, and they thought that it must be an enormous ship. They waited for a long time, thinking that the ship would put in to shore nearby. As the driftwood was blown closer to shore by the wind, they kept on waiting, but they no longer thought it was a great ship as before; they were now expecting some kind of smaller boat. As it was carried in even closer, they saw that it was just a piece of driftwood. The men then said to one another, 'How foolish of us! We had high expectations for something that was actually nothing.'

The same is true of people. Often we are in awe of someone whom we have never even seen, but when we get to know him, we realize that he is really not important at all.

Fable 280 (Phaedrus 4.24 = Perry 520)

The Mountain in Labour

A mountain had gone into labour and was groaning terribly. Such rumours excited great expectations all over the country. In the end, however, the mountain gave birth to a mouse.

This is a fable written for people who make serious-sounding threats but who actually accomplish nothing.

NOTE: Thanks to its citation by Horace, *Art of Poetry* 139, this proverbial saying has enjoyed a long-lived popularity.

Fable 281 (Chambry 160 = Perry 126)

The Jackdaw and the Figs

A hungry jackdaw alighted on a fig tree. He discovered that the figs were still not ripe, so he decided to wait until they were ready. A fox saw the jackdaw loitering there and asked him what he was waiting for. The fox then offered the jackdaw this piece of advice: 'It is a big mistake to entertain such expectations: hope will lead you on at first but then leave you empty-handed.'

Fable 282 (Aphthonius 39 = Perry 158)

The Wolf and the Nurse

A story about a wolf and a nurse, exhorting us not to count on our hopes in advance of the outcome.

A nurse was annoyed because her infant charge kept crying. When he refused to be quiet, she said that if he didn't stop bawling, she would throw him to the wolf. A wolf just happened to be passing by and he waited for the nurse to carry out her threat. But the child fell asleep, so the wolf went away bereft of the gain he could have obtained on his own, as well as the gain he had hoped to acquire elsewhere.

There is no point in hoping for things that are not going to happen.

NOTE: For a misogynistic moral to this same story, see Fable 283 (following).

Fable 283 (Babrius 16 = Perry 158)

The Wolf and the Nurse

There was a rustic nurse whose baby kept on crying, so she made the following threat: 'Be quiet, or else I will throw you to the wolf!' A wolf heard this and took the woman's words literally, so he sat there, waiting as if dinner were about to be served. At evening time the baby finally fell asleep, so the wolf went away hungry, his mouth gaping open, after having waited with high hopes for something that was never going to happen. When he got home, the she-wolf asked him, 'Why have you come back home without bringing anything? You always used to bring something with you!' The wolf said in reply, 'How could it be otherwise, since I believed the words of a woman?'

NOTE: The 'wolf who gaped like a fool' or the 'gaping wolf' was a proverbial figure in ancient Greece (e.g. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 629).

Fable 284 (Chambry 174 = Perry 233)

The Swan and His Owner

They say that swans sing when they are about to die. A certain man chanced upon a swan that was for sale and bought him, since he

had heard that swans sing very beautifully. At the man's next dinner party, he came and got the swan, expecting that the bird would serenade his guests at dinner. The swan, however, was completely silent. Later on, when the swan realized that he was about to die, he began to sing his funeral dirge. When his owner heard him, he said, 'Well, if you are going to sing this song only at the moment of your death, then I was a fool for having commanded you to do it. I should have ordered you to be butchered instead!'

Some people are the same way: they will agree to do things under compulsion that they are not willing to do as a favour.

NOTE: The 'swan song' was a famous legend of ancient Greece and Rome (Plato, *Phaedo* 85a, contains a discussion of the reason why swans supposedly sing at the moment of their death; Pliny, *Natural History* 10.32, claims to have conducted certain 'experiments' disproving this phenomenon). For another fable with the swan-song motif, see Fable 303.

Fable 285 (Odo 38 = Perry 604)

The Kite and the Partridges

How earthly prosperity can be deceptive, and so on.

One day the kite happened to consider his wings and feet and talons. 'Indeed,' he exclaimed, 'am I not just as well armed as the hawk and the falcon? Look at what wings and what feet and what talons I have! Why shouldn't I go and catch some partridges?' The

kite knew a place where he could find many partridges so he went there and launched his attack: he seized one partridge with his beak, another with his wings, and one more in each foot. But the kite couldn't keep hold of that many partridges, so in the end he had none. Hence the saying: *Seize all, lose all*. From then on, the kite never tried to hunt wild birds again.

NOTE: Compare the Roman proverb, 'the man who chases two hares does not catch either one' (e.g. Publilius Syrus 186).

Fable 286 (Chambry 204 = Perry 148)

The Lion, the Hare, and the Deer

A lion had found a hare as he was sleeping. But just as he was about to devour the creature, the lion happened to catch sight of a passing deer whereupon he abruptly abandoned the hare and ran off chasing after the deer. Awakened by the noise, the hare leaped up and bounded away. Meanwhile, the lion spent a long time chasing the deer but in the end he didn't catch her. He came back to where he had left the hare and discovered that the hare had also slipped away. At this point, the lion exclaimed, 'It serves me right! Since I preferred the possibility of something more, I lost the food that was already within my grasp.'

This is how some people behave: not satisfied with their moderate profits, they instead chase after the chance of something better and as a result they unwittingly lose what they previously had in their possession.

NOTE: The ‘sleeping hare’ was proverbial (see Erasmus, *Adages* 1.10.57). For another sleeping hare, see Fable 237, the story of the tortoise and the hare.

Fable 287 (Avianus 20 = Perry 18)

The Fisherman and the Fish

There was a fisherman who was in the habit of catching his prey on the hook of his fishing line. One time he reeled in the trifling weight of a tiny fish which he had snagged. He lifted the fish up into the air and stabbed it with a piercing wound through its gaping mouth. The fish then burst into tears and pleaded with the man. ‘Please spare me,’ he said. ‘After all, what sort of profit will you get from my body? My fertile mother just now spawned me down in the rocky caves, sending me to play in the waters that are the fishes’ domain. Put aside this threat, and allow my slender young body to grow fat for your table. This same strand of the shore will give me back to you again, and I will voluntarily return to your fishing rod a little while from now, fatter for having fed on the blue waters of the boundless sea.’ The fisherman said that it was absolutely forbidden to let a fish go once it had been caught, and he complained that good deeds are often not rewarded when left up to chance. Finally the man concluded, ‘It’s bad business to ever surrender any possible gain, and even more foolish to start over again in hopes of greater profits.’

FABLES ABOUT TIMING AND OPPORTUNITY

Fable 288 (Chambry 75* = Perry 48)

The Bat and the Songbird

A songbird was hanging in a cage in a window. A bat flew up and asked the songbird why she sang at night but was silent during the day. The songbird said that she had her reasons: it was while she had been singing once during the day that she had been captured. This had taught her a lesson, and she had vowed that she would sing only at night. The bat remarked, 'But there is no need for that now, when it won't do you any good: you should have been on your guard before you were captured!'

The story shows that it is useless to repent after disaster has struck.

NOTE: This species of bird, *botalis* in Greek (or, in this version, *boutalis*), is otherwise unidentified. The story seems to be an aetiological account of some nocturnal songbird like the nightingale.

Fable 289 (Syntipas 23 = Perry 211)

The Drowning Boy

A boy had gone down to the river to bathe, but because he didn't know how to swim he was in danger of drowning. The boy then saw a man walking by and called to him for help. As the man was pulling the boy out of the water, he said, 'If you don't know how to swim, why on earth did you dare to try these swollen river waters?'

The drowning boy replied, ‘Right now I just need your help; you can lecture me about it afterwards!’

The fable shows that people who lecture someone during a moment of crisis are offering criticism that is inappropriate and out of place.

Fable 290 (Herodotus 1.141 = Perry 11)

The Fisherman and His Pipe

There was once a fisherman who saw some fish in the sea and played on his pipe, expecting them to come out onto the land. When his hopes proved false, he took a net and used it instead, and in this way he was able to haul in a huge catch of fish. As the fish were all leaping about, the fisherman remarked, ‘I say, enough of your dancing, since you refused to dance when I played my pipe for you before!’

Fable 291 (Chambry 172 = Perry 54)

The Farmer’s Boy and the Snails

A farmer’s boy was roasting snails. When he heard them sizzling in the fire, he said, ‘You wretched creatures! Your homes are on fire and all you can do is sing!’

This story shows that anything which is done at the wrong time is liable to be ridiculed.

Fable 292 (Chambry 80* = Perry 52)

The Farmer and His Dogs

There was a farmer who was trapped on his country estate by a winter storm. He didn't have any food, so first he ate his sheep, then his goats. When the storm got worse, he even slaughtered the oxen who pulled his plough. When the dogs saw what was happening, they said to one another, 'Let's get out of here now! Since we can see that the master didn't even spare the oxen who labour on his behalf, how can we expect to be spared?'

The story shows that you should especially avoid someone who does not even spare his own people.

Fable 293 (Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 2.29 = Perry 325)

The Crested Lark and the Farmer

There is a little bird who is called the crested lark. She lives in the wheat-fields and makes her nest there precisely at the time of year that will allow her chicks to be just getting their feathers when the harvest is gathered. One time, the lark happened to have made her nest in some crops that had ripened earlier than usual and as a result her chicks were still not able to fly when the wheat had already turned to yellow. So when the mother bird went to gather food for her chicks, she warned them that if anything unexpected should happen or if the chicks should chance to hear anything, they should pay close attention and tell her everything as soon as she returned. Meanwhile, the farmer whose field it was called his young son and said, 'Do you see how the crops have ripened and now

require our labour? As soon as it is light tomorrow, go to our friends and ask them to come lend a hand to help harvest our crop.' Having said this to his son, the farmer then went away. When the lark came back home, the terrified chicks all began chirping in fright and begged their mother to hurry up and take them right away to some other nesting place, since the farmer had sent someone to ask his friends to come at dawn and reap the harvest. The mother ordered them to stay calm. 'If the farmer is expecting his friends to help with the harvest,' she said, 'there will be no harvesting of the crops tomorrow, and there is no need for me to carry you away today.' The next day the mother flew away again to look for food. The farmer, meanwhile, was waiting for the friends that he had summoned. The sun was blazing high in the sky but nothing was happening; the day dragged on, but none of the farmer's friends appeared. The farmer again spoke to his son and said, 'Our friends are all so lazy! Why don't we go ask our relatives to come right away and help with the harvesting tomorrow?' As on the day before, the chicks were stricken with terror and told their mother what had happened. The mother urged them once again to not be afraid or worry: relatives never obey such requests for help right away, since they are hardly willing to get to work so quickly. 'But pay attention,' she said, 'in case you hear something different tomorrow.' The next day at dawn the mother bird went off in search of food, while the farmer's relatives failed to supply the help that had been requested of them. So the farmer finally said to his son, 'Enough of these friends and relatives! At first light tomorrow I want you to bring

two sickles, one for me and one for you: we will reap the wheat tomorrow by ourselves, using our own hands.' When the mother learned from her chicks what the farmer had said, she concluded, 'Now it is time for us to surrender our home and move away: without a doubt, it will happen just as the farmer said. It's up to him, now that he's not expecting anybody else to help.' So the lark abandoned her nest and the farmer harvested his crops.

This is an Aesop's fable about how one's relatives and friends are generally unreliable and not to be trusted. In effect, this is basically what the more respectable books of philosophy advise us to do: we should rely only on ourselves, regarding everything which does not involve us or our livelihood as something that is none of our business and not to our benefit. Ennius included this Aesop's fable in his Satires, narrating these events in witty and elegant verse. I will quote the final lines, which I think are worth learning by heart and keeping in mind: 'Now keep this saying always at the forefront of your thoughts, and don't wait for your friends to do something that you are perfectly able to do for yourself'

NOTE: Ennius (d. 169 BCE) was a Roman poet whose works survive only in fragments. Here Aulus Gellius, a Latin rhetorician of the second century CE, tells the fable in his own words and then quotes the moral originally supplied by Ennius in verse.

Fable 294 (Babrius 26 = Perry 297)

The Farmer and the Cranes

There were some cranes who came to nibble at a field which a farmer had recently sown with wheat. For a while the farmer was able to chase the cranes away by waving an empty sling to frighten them. Eventually the cranes realized that the swinging of the sling in the air did them no harm, so they ignored the farmer whenever he tried to chase them away. Finally the farmer abandoned his initial strategy and began throwing rocks at the cranes, crippling a good many of them. As the cranes abandoned the field they cried to one another, 'Let's run away to the land of the Pygmies! This man is no longer just trying to frighten us: he has actually started to do something about it!'

NOTE: The enmity between the cranes and the legendary 'Pygmies' was an ancient Greek legend (e.g. Homer, *Iliad* 3.1 ff.).

Fable 295 (Babrius 33 = Perry 298)

The Farmer and the Birds

At the setting of the Pleiades, when it is time to sow the crops, there was a certain farmer who had cast his wheat seed into the fresh earth. He had to keep an eye on the field because an immense flock of squawking jackdaws had arrived, and starlings too, that plague of seed sown in the fields. Behind the farmer walked a boy, carrying an empty sling. The starlings instinctively listened to hear when the farmer asked for the sling and they flew away before he could hit them. The farmer then decided to take another approach. He called the boy and told him what they were going to do. 'My boy,' said the

farmer, ‘we must use a trick to defeat this clever tribe of birds. So whenever they show up, I will ask you for bread, but instead of bread you will give me the sling.’ The starlings came back and began pecking at the field. The farmer asked for bread, according to the plan, and the starlings did not run away. The boy then filled the sling with stones and gave it to the farmer. The old man began to stone the birds, hitting one bird in the head, another in the leg, and another in the shoulder, so that the birds all flew away from the field. They happened to meet up with some cranes who asked them what had happened. One of the jackdaws replied, ‘Stay away from this wicked species of humans: they have learned to say one thing while doing another.’

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: ‘Beware the sort of person who uses tricks.’

Fable 296 (Ademar 19 = Perry 298)

The Crane and the Crow

A crane and a crow had made a mutual pledge of assistance, agreeing that the crane was to defend the crow from other birds, while the crow would use her powers of prophecy to warn the crane about future events. These two birds often went to the field of a certain man and ate the crops that he had sowed there, tearing them up by the roots. When the farmer saw what was happening to his field, he was upset, and said to his boy, ‘Give me a stone.’ The crow alerted the crane, and they prudently made their escape. On another

occasion, the crow again heard the farmer asking for a stone and warned the crane so that the crane would not get hurt. After some thought, the man understood that the crow was able to predict what was happening. He said to the boy, ‘When I say, “give me some bread,” I want you to give me a stone.’ The farmer then went to the field and told the boy to give him some bread, so the boy gave him a stone. The farmer threw the stone at the crane and broke both his legs. The injured crane said to the crow, ‘What has become of your god-given prophecies? Why didn’t you warn me that this was going to happen?’ The crow then said to the crane, ‘In this case it is not my understanding that is at fault. The counsels of wicked people are always deceptive, since they say one thing and do another!’

For someone who seduces innocent people with his promises but later causes them nothing but trouble.

NOTE: For another fable about the crow’s prophetic powers, see Fable 319.

FABLES ABOUT IDENTITY AND APPEARANCE

Fable 297 (Romulus 4.7 = Perry 576)

The Birds, the Bird-catcher, and His Tears

Our author warns us with the following fable that we should never fail to heed a wise man’s advice.

It was springtime and various species of birds were sitting happily in their nests, hidden among the branches. They happened to notice a

bird-catcher who was assembling his reeds, coating the long rod with birdlime. When they saw that the man had tears in his eyes, those ignorant and foolish birds began to say to one another, ‘We can see that this man must be extremely kind, since his great sensitivity makes him burst into tears whenever he looks at us.’ One of the birds who was wiser than the rest, being experienced in all the bird-catcher’s tricks, is supposed to have said, ‘Oh no! Run away, you foolish and innocent birds! Save yourselves from this trap! I beg you to fly as fast as you can up high in the sky, making good use of your wings. If you want to know the truth, look carefully at what he is doing: you will see that he is planning to catch some of us in his snare, and once we are caught he will kill us or strangle us and carry us off in that basket.’

This fable informs us that one person’s advice can easily save many others from danger.

NOTE: The fables in the medieval prose paraphrases of Phaedrus regularly refer to our ‘author’, meaning Aesop or else his putative translator ‘Romulus’ (Phaedrus’ name had been long since forgotten).

Fable 298 (Phaedrus 4.2 = Perry 511)

The Mice and the Weasel

You might think I am only joking, and it’s true that I amuse myself with a light-hearted stroke of the pen, not having anything of real importance

on my agenda. Yet you should pay careful attention to these little tales: useful things can come in quite small packages! Appearances can be deceiving: people are often fooled by first impressions, and it takes an exceptional mind to detect something hidden in an unexpected nook or cranny. Still, I've gone on too long without offering any reward to the reader, so I will throw in a fable for good measure: the story of the weasel and the mice.

A weasel, enfeebled by old age and senility, was no longer able to pursue the swift-footed mice, so she decided to coat herself with flour and lie down nonchalantly in a dark corner of the house. One of the mice thought that she must be something good to eat, but as soon as he pounced, the weasel caught him and consigned him to oblivion; another mouse did the same, and a third mouse likewise met his doom. A few mice later, another mouse arrived: his skin was wrinkled with extreme old age and he had escaped many a time from snares and traps. Already at a distance he recognized the ambush prepared by their cunning enemy. 'You there, lying in the corner,' said the mouse, 'I wish you well if—and only if—you really are made of flour!'

Fable 299 (Babrius 17 = Perry 79)

The Chickens and the Cat

A cat laid a trap for the chickens by hanging himself from a peg as if he were a sack. When the quick-witted rooster with his hooked spurs noticed the cat, he made this sharp remark: 'I've seen many

sacks in my life, so I know what they look like—and not one of them ever had the teeth of a living cat!'

NOTE: The Greek prose version (Chambry 13) is about mice, not chickens.

Fable 300 (Plutarch, *Life of Aratus* 30 = Perry 446)

The Birds and the Cuckoo

Aesop says that when the cuckoo asked the little birds why they ran away from him, they said it was because he would someday turn into a hawk.

NOTE: The metamorphosis of the cuckoo into a hawk is referred to in Aristotle, *History of the Animals* 563^{b}.

Fable 301 (Ademar 61 = Perry 572)

The She-Goat, the Kid, and the Wolf

A goat had given birth to a young kid. In order to protect her unsuspecting offspring, the mother warned the kid not to open the door, as she knew that there were many wild beasts prowling about the sheepfold. Having issued her warning, the mother goat then went away. Next, the wolf arrived at the door, imitating the mother goat's voice. When he heard the voice, the kid replied, 'I hear my mother's voice, but I know you are a liar and no friend of mine! By disguising yourself with my mother's voice, you think will be able to drink my blood and eat my flesh.'

It is a good idea to follow the orders given to you by your parents.

Fable 302 (Syntipas 39 = Perry 199)

The Boy and the Scorpion

A young boy had gone far off into the desert where he was catching crickets to put them in cages. When he noticed a scorpion in their midst, he mistook it for another cricket. The boy reached down to pick the scorpion up off the ground, whereupon the scorpion pointed his sting at the boy, ready to stab him, and said, 'If you had gone so far as to touch me, I would have set both you and your crickets free!'

This fable shows that you should not treat bad people the same way that you treat good people; rather, you should deal with each of them in the way that suits their character.

NOTE: For the practice of catching crickets for their song, see Theocritus 1.

Fable 303 (Aphthonius 2 = Perry 399)

The Goose and the Swan

A story about a goose and a swan, exhorting young people to study.

A wealthy man wanted to raise a goose and a swan together but for different purposes: the swan was for singing and the goose was for eating. The time came for the goose to meet his appointed fate and have his throat cut. Yet the darkness of night-time prevented the

man from knowing which bird was which. As a result, he grabbed the swan instead of the goose. The swan then declared his true nature by bursting into a swan-song, and thus narrowly escaped from death.

The fable shows that music is so powerful that it can even avert death.

NOTE: For another fable with the swan song motif, see Fable 284.

Fable 304 (Syntipas 5 = Perry 59)

The Weasel and the File

A weasel went into a blacksmith's shop and there she came across an iron file. She began to lick the file with delight, scraping her tongue in a mad effort to overpower the instrument of iron. The weasel's tongue started to bleed, making her even happier; the taste of blood made her think she was actually devouring the file. So the weasel kept on licking until her tongue was completely gone.

This story shows that people who think there is a profit in some useless activity will get so carried away by what they are doing that they destroy themselves.

Fable 305 (Phaedrus 4.8 = Perry 93)

The Viper and the File

If you have ever tried to take a bite out of someone whose fangs are even sharper than yours, you will recognize yourself in this story.

A viper entered a blacksmith's workshop and bit the file, testing it to see if this was something she could eat. The file protested fiercely, 'You fool! Why are you trying to wound me with your teeth, when I am able to gnaw through every sort of iron?'

> NOTE: In Caxton 3.12), the file pronounces a whole series of proverbs: 'And Therefore thow arte a foole to gnawe me | For I telle the | that none euyll may hurte ne adommage another as euylle as he | Ne none wycked may hurte another wycked | ne also the hard ageynst the hard shalle not breke eche other | ne two enuyous men shal not both ryde vpon an asse | wherfor the myghty and stronge must loue hym whiche is as myghty and as stronge as hym self is.'

Fable 306 (Chambry 31* = Perry 19)

The Fox and the Bramble

A fox climbing up over a fence was about to slip and fall, so she reached out and grabbed hold of a bramble bush but the brambles scratched the soft padding of the fox's paws. Stung by the sharp pain, the fox asked the bramble bush why she had acted so cruelly, when the fox had simply grabbed onto her for help. The bramble replied, 'My dear, you must be out of your mind to grab hold of someone like me, since I am the one who always grabs everyone else!'

The same is true about people: it is foolish to expect help from someone who is naturally unkind.

NOTE: In Caxton (6.5), the bramble bush makes a further criticism of the fox's behaviour: 'For thow supposest to haue taken me as thow arte custommed to take chekyns and hennes.' For an explanation of why the bramble bush grabs every passer-by, see Fable 500.

Fable 307 (Chambry 263 = Perry 237)

The Man and the New Donkey

There was a man who wanted to buy a donkey. He selected one donkey for further examination and led him to where his own donkeys were, leaving him by the feeding trough. The new donkey went and stood next to the donkey who was the laziest and greediest of them all, ignoring the others. As the new donkey showed no signs of any better behaviour, the man led him away again, returning him to his former master. When asked whether he had given the donkey a fair chance, the man explained, 'I don't even need to put him to the test: I know what kind of donkey he is because of the company he keeps.'

The story shows that a person is considered similar to the people whose companionship he enjoys.

FABLES ABOUT FAKE DOCTORS

Fable 308 (Aphthonius 24 = Perry 289)

The Fox and the Frog

A story about a frog, urging us not to trust someone's promises before they are fulfilled.

There was a frog who claimed to be trained in the physician's art, acquainted with all the medicinal plants of the earth, the only creature who could cure the animals' ailments. The fox listened to the frog's announcement and exposed his lies by the colour of his skin. 'How can it be,' said the fox, 'that you are able to cure others of their illnesses, but the signs of sickness can still be seen in your own face?'

Boastful claims end up exposing themselves.

NOTE: The biblical proverb 'physician, heal thyself!' (Luke 4: 23) is found in the epimythium to this fable in Caxton (7.5): 'For the leche whiche wylle hele somme other | ought fyrste to hele hym self.'

Fable 309 (Romulus 4.15 = Perry 392)

The Wolf and the Donkey

The word of a wicked man can never be trusted. Listen to this fable, for example.

The wolf paid a visit to the ailing donkey. He began to touch the donkey's body and to ask him in what part of his body he felt the greatest pain. The donkey answered, 'Wherever you touch me!'

The same is true of wicked people: even if they pretend to be helpful and speak nicely, they are actually in a hurry to harm you.

Fable 310 (Babrius 121 = Perry 7)

The Cat and the Hen

There was a hen who was not feeling well. The cat bent over her and said, 'How are you? Is there anything you need? I will bring you whatever you want; please just take care of yourself.' 'I'll live,' said the hen, 'if you will just go away!'

NOTE: This story is also found in Plutarch, *On Brotherly Love* 12.

Fable 311 (Phaedrus *App.* 19 = Perry 547)

The Sow and the Wolf

A pregnant sow lay on the ground, groaning with the pangs of labour. A wolf came running up and offered his assistance, saying that he could play the role of midwife. The sow, however, recognized the deception lurking in the wicked wolf's conniving mind and she rejected his suspicious offer. 'It's enough for me,' said the sow, 'if you will just keep your distance!' If that sow had entrusted herself to the treacherous wolf, she would have wept with the pain of childbirth while bewailing her own demise.

NOTE: There is a promythium appended to the fable in Perotti's Appendix: 'A man should be put to the test before you put your trust in him.'

Fable 312 (Babrius 122 = Perry 187)

The Wolf and the Lame Donkey

A donkey had gone lame after stepping on a sharp thorn. Then he noticed a wolf nearby. Plainly afraid that the wolf might kill him, the donkey said, ‘O wolf, I am dying; I’m about to draw my last breath. But I am glad to have run into you; I would prefer to have you feast on my flesh rather than a vulture or a raven. So please do me a little favour, a trifle really, and remove this prickly thorn from my hoof so that my spirit can go down to Hades free from pain.’ The wolf said, ‘That is a favour I can’t begrudge you.’ So he pulled out the burning thorn with the sharp edge of his teeth. Freed from all his pain and suffering, the donkey ran away, kicking with his heels at the tawny wolf who stood with his mouth hanging open. As the donkey’s hooves crushed the wolf’s head and nose and jaws, the wolf exclaimed, ‘Alas, it serves me right! Why did I take up the doctor’s trade, healing the lame at a moment like this, when the only profession I ever learned was how to be a butcher!’

NOTE: For the proverbial ‘wolf with his mouth hanging open’, see Fable 283. This same story was also told about a lion and a horse; see Fable 313 (following).

Fable 313 (Romulus 3.2 = Perry 187)

The Lion and the Horse

Those who are ignorant of their craft will give themselves away, as the following fable shows.

A mighty lion saw a horse grazing in a field. In order to sneakily deceive the horse, the lion approached him in a friendly fashion and said he was a doctor. The horse suspected a trick, but he did not reject the lion's claims. When the lion drew closer, the horse quickly thought up an escape. He pretended that he had a splinter in his hoof, so he lifted up his foot and said, 'Help me, brother; I am so glad you are here! Save me from the splinter that I have stepped on.' The lion approached with feigned deference, concealing his true intentions, whereupon the horse suddenly kicked the lion in the face. Down fell the deadly foe! The lion lay there on the ground for quite a while, and when he came to he saw that the horse was gone and he realized that his head and face and whole body had been wounded. 'It serves me right for approaching the horse in a gentle and friendly way', said the lion. 'I came to him in the guise of a doctor but I should have approached him like an enemy, as I always did before!'

Let the audience pay close attention: be yourself and don't pretend to be someone you're not.

FABLES ABOUT FALSE PROPHETS

Fable 314 (Plato, *Theaetetus* 174a = Perry 40)

The Astronomer and the Thracian Woman

When Thales the astronomer was gazing up at the sky, he fell into a pit. A Thracian slave woman, who was both wise and witty, is said to have made fun of him for being eager to know what was happening over his head while failing to notice what was right there at his feet.

NOTE: There are many versions of this anecdote about the philosopher or astronomer who falls into a ditch (for Roman examples, see Cicero, *On The Republic* 1.30 and *On Divination* 2.13.30). Thales was one of the legendary 'seven sages' of ancient Greece. Thrace (modern Balkans) was reportedly the home both of Aesop, at least according to some sources, and also of the Roman poet Phaedrus, as he himself declares in the prologue to Book 3 of his fables.

Fable 315 (Chambry 91* = Perry 56)

The Witch on Trial

There was a witch who claimed to be able to perform magic ceremonies to avert divine wrath. She was often employed for such purposes and earned a considerable profit in this line of work. Certain people then accused her of sacrilege. The woman was arrested and condemned to death. As they were leading her away, someone saw her and said, 'You claimed to be able to turn aside the anger of the gods, so why weren't you able to ward off the plans of mere mortals?'

The fable shows that people often make extravagant promises which they are completely unable to carry out.

Fable 316 (Chambry 233* = Perry 161)

The Soothsayer and the Theft

There was a soothsayer who used to sit in the market-place and predict the future. Someone suddenly appeared and told the soothsayer that the doors of his house had been forced open and that everything inside had been stolen. The soothsayer groaned and sprang to his feet, rushing off to his house. Someone saw him running and said, 'Hey you! You claim to be able to tell what is going to happen to other people in advance, so why were you not able to predict your own future?'

This is a fable for people who do a poor job of managing their own lives but who nevertheless make pronouncements about things that are none of their business.

Fable 317 (Phaedrus 3.3 = Perry 495)

Aesop and the Soothsayers

People consider someone with real life experience to be more reliable than a soothsayer, but they cannot say why: my little fable will be the first to provide an explanation.

There was a farmer who had a flock of sheep, and those sheep gave birth to lambs with human heads. Alarmed by this omen the farmer hurried off, deeply upset, to consult the soothsayers. One soothsayer

told him that the birth of lambs with human heads indicated a matter of life and death for him as the ‘head’ of the household, and a sacrifice would be required to ward off the danger. Another soothsayer insisted that this was instead a sign that the man’s wife had been unfaithful to him, and that she had passed off other men’s sons as his own; this evil omen could only be averted by an even greater sacrifice. To make a long story short, the soothsayers argued about their interpretations with one another, heightening the man’s anxiety with more and more causes for alarm. Aesop also happened to be there, that old man who was nobody’s fool: there was no way that nature could play tricks on him! ‘If you want to expiate this omen,’ said Aesop, ‘I suggest you supply your shepherds with wives!’

NOTE: This same anecdote is told about the legendary wise man Thales in Plutarch’s *Banquet of the Seven Sages*.

Fable 318 (Chambry 255 = Perry 236)

The Merchants and the Raven

Some merchants were making a journey when they happened to meet a raven who was blind in one eye. The travellers halted and one of them said that the sign given to them by the raven meant that they should turn back home. Another member of the company protested, ‘But how can such a bird predict what is going to happen to us, when he couldn’t even predict the loss of his own eye in time to take preventive measures?’

The same is true of people: someone who cannot manage his own affairs is not qualified to give advice to his neighbours.

Fable 319 (Chambry 170* = Perry 125)

The Travellers and the Crow

The crow was jealous of the raven's power to reveal signs to mankind by means of omens, since the raven was always being consulted to find out what was going to happen. When the crow saw some travellers passing by, she flew up into a tree and perched there, squawking loudly. The men turned towards the sound in alarm, but then one of them said, 'Hey, let's go! It's just a crow, whose squawking doesn't mean a thing.'

The story shows that people do the same thing: when someone tries to imitate his superiors, he will both fail in his attempt and become the butt of jokes.

Fable 320 (Chambry 171* = Perry 127)

The Crow and Athena

The crow was making a sacrifice to Athena and invited a dog to the feast. The dog said to her, 'Why do you foolishly squander these sacrifices? The goddess clearly hates you so much that she has taken away all credibility from your omens.' The crow answered, 'That is all the more reason for me to sacrifice to her: I hope she will change her attitude towards me!'

The fable shows that people are often eager to treat their enemies well in the hopes of gaining something by it.

FABLES ABOUT DISGUISES AND PRETENCE

Fable 321 (Nikephoros Basilakis, in Walz, *Rhetores Graeci* = Perry 451)

The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

You can get into trouble by wearing a disguise.

A wolf once decided to change his nature by changing his appearance, and thus get plenty to eat. He put on a sheepskin and accompanied the flock to the pasture. The shepherd was fooled by the disguise. When night fell, the shepherd shut up the wolf in the fold with the rest of the sheep, and as the fence was placed across the entrance, the sheepfold was securely closed off. But when the shepherd wanted a sheep for his supper, he took his knife and killed … the wolf.

Someone who wears a disguise often loses his life and finds that his performance occasions a major catastrophe.

NOTE: Compare the biblical 'wolf in sheep's clothing' (Matthew 7: 15).

Fable 322 (Chambry 267 = Perry 188)

The Fox, the Donkey, and the Lion Skin

A donkey put on the skin of a lion and went around frightening all the animals. The donkey saw a fox and tried to frighten her too, but she had heard his voice first, so she said to the donkey, ‘You can be sure that I too would have been afraid, if I had not already heard the sound of your bray.’

Likewise, there are certain ignorant people whose outward affectations give them an air of importance, but their true identity comes out as soon as they open their big mouths.

NOTE: There are striking parallels between the motif of the ‘donkey in the lion’s skin’ and the Buddhist *Sihacama-jataka* (compare also the donkey in the leopard’s skin in the opening story of Book 3 of the *Panchatantra*).

Fable 323 (Aphthonius 10 = Perry 358)

The Farmers, the Donkey, and the Lion Skin

A story about a donkey, urging us not to yearn for more than we deserve.

A donkey wanted to appear to be a lion. Since he could not change his nature, he tried to realize his dreams by a change of costume, and like a lion he wreaked havoc on the fruits of the farmers’ labour. But when a gust of wind blew up, it stripped the lion bare of his disguise. As soon as the farmers whose crops he had eaten saw that he was just a donkey, they came and clubbed him to death.

Adornments that do not belong to you can be dangerous.

NOTE: In one version of this story, the event was supposed to have taken place at Cyme, an Aeolian settlement in Asia Minor. The people of Cyme (who were proverbially stupid) had never seen a lion and were foolishly convinced by the donkey in the lion's skin, even though the donkey's ears were clearly visible. This anecdote gave rise to the expression, 'Like the donkey among the people of Cyme' (see Erasmus, *Adages* 1.7.12 and especially 1.3.66, citing the story from Lucian's *Fisherman*).

Fable 324 (Chambry 305* = Perry 73)

The Monkey and the Dolphin

It is common to take Maltese dogs and pet monkeys on long sea voyages in order to relieve the boredom of the passage. A man who was planning to make such a voyage had brought his monkey along with him, but when the ship had reached Cape Sounion (which is a sea promontory near Athens), they were met by a fierce winter storm. The ship was capsized and everyone was thrown into the water. The monkey also started swimming and was spotted by a dolphin, who thought the monkey was a man. The dolphin swam up under the monkey and carried him through the water. When they were approaching Piraeus, the Athenian harbour, the dolphin asked the monkey if he was originally from Athens. The monkey said that he was, and that he happened to be from an illustrious family. The dolphin then asked if he knew Piraeus. The monkey thought that Piraeus must be a person's name, so he said that, yes, Piraeus was a

near and dear friend of his. The dolphin was infuriated by the monkey's lying words, so he plunged the creature into the water and killed him.

This fable is suitable for a man who tells lies.

Fable 325 (Chambry 163* = Perry 129)

The Jackdaw and the Doves

A jackdaw saw that the doves in a dovecote were very well fed, so he dyed himself white and went to join them, expecting to share in their food. So long as the jackdaw kept quiet, the doves thought he was another dove and accepted him, but when he forgot to keep quiet and let out a squawk, the pigeons then recognized who he was and they pecked at him until he went away. Unable to feed with the doves, he then went back again to the jackdaws. But because they did not recognize his colour, they kept him away from their food and the jackdaw ended up with nothing to eat at all.

The story shows that we too must be contented with our lot in life, since being greedy for more is pointless and can even deprive us of the things that are ours.

Fable 326 (Phaedrus 1.3 = Perry 472)

The Jackdaw and the Peacocks

Aesop offers us this instructive story so that we will refrain from strutting about in other people's stuff, and instead live our lives in the clothes that suit us.

A jackdaw, puffed up with foolish pride, found some peacock feathers that had fallen on the ground. He picked up the feathers and, putting them on, he tried to join the lovely peacock flock, scorning his fellow jackdaws. The peacocks, however, tore the feathers off that presumptuous bird and pecked at him until he went away. After having been badly mauled by the peacocks, the jackdaw then sadly returned to his own folk, but he was cast out once again and suffered the pain of public humiliation. One of the jackdaws whom he had originally scorned said to him, 'If you had been content to dwell among us, satisfied with what Nature had bestowed on you, then you would not have been humiliated by the peacocks, nor would your disgrace have met with our rebuff.'

NOTE: Horace alludes to a version of this story in which it is a crow, not a jackdaw, who puts on other feathers (*Epistles* 1.3.18 ff.).

Fable 327 (Chambry 161 = Perry 123)

The Jackdaw and the Ravens

There was a jackdaw who was bigger than the other jackdaws. Scorning his fellows, he joined the company of the ravens, having decided to spend his life as a member of their flock. The ravens, however, did not recognize the voice of this bird or his appearance, so they attacked him and drove him away. Rejected by the ravens, he went back again to the jackdaws. But the jackdaws were angry

about his presumptuous behaviour and refused to accept him. The final result was that the jackdaw had nowhere to go.

This is also true of someone who leaves his homeland, preferring to live elsewhere: he is treated with contempt abroad and is rejected by his own people for his presumptuous behaviour.

NOTE: For the Greeks, the jackdaw was a bird who was supposed to stick to his own flock. The equivalent of the English proverb 'birds of a feather flock together' was *koloios poti koloion*, 'the jackdaw (stands) next to the jackdaw' (e.g. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155[a]).

Fable 328 (Odo 3)

The Crow, the Eagle, and the Feathers

A fable against people who boast that they have something they do not.

There was a crow who saw that she was ugly and black, so she complained to the eagle. The eagle told her to borrow some feathers from her fellow birds. The crow did as the eagle suggested, taking feathers from the tail of the peacock, from the wings of the dove, and so on and so forth, appropriating the other birds' feathers. When the crow decided that she was sufficiently well dressed, she began to laugh at the other birds and yell at them. The other birds then went and complained to the eagle about the boastful crow. The eagle replied, 'Let every bird take back her feathers, and thus

humiliate the crow.' This is what they did, and so the crow was left ugly and naked.

Fable 329 (Aphthonius 31 = Perry 101)

The Beauty Contest of the Birds

A story about a jackdaw, urging us to hate arrogance.

A beauty contest was held and all the birds went to be judged by Zeus. Hermes fixed the appointed day and the birds flocked to the rivers and ponds where they shed their shabby feathers and preened their finer ones. The jackdaw, however, had no natural advantages to commend his appearance, so he decorated himself with the feathers that had been cast aside by the other birds. The owl alone recognized her own feathers and took them away from the jackdaw, and she incited the other birds to do the same. When the jackdaw had been stripped bare by everyone, he went before the judgement of Zeus naked.

Adornments that do not belong to you can lead to humiliation.

NOTE: For the beauty contest of the animals, see Fable 253.

Fable 330 (Babrius 101 = Perry 344)

The Fox, the Wolf, and the Lions

There was a wolf who had grown so much stouter than his fellow wolves that they started calling him 'Lion'. This honour was not enough to satisfy the foolish wolf, so he left the pack and began to

consort with the lions instead. A fox made fun of him and said, ‘I hope that I never get such an inflated idea of myself as you now have of yourself: you may seem like a lion to the wolves, but when the lions take your measure, you’ll go back to being nothing but a wolf!’

FABLES ABOUT ANIMALS OUT OF PLACE

Fable 331 (Babrius 115 = Perry 230)

The Eagle and the Tortoise in the Air

There was once a slow-moving tortoise who said to the shearwaters of the marsh and to the gulls and the wild terns, ‘If only I too had been made with wings!’ An eagle spoke to her in jest and said, ‘O little tortoise, what wages would you give to me, an eagle, if I were to lift you lightly up into the air?’ ‘I would give to you all the gifts that come from the Eastern Sea,’ said the tortoise. ‘Well then, I will teach you,’ said the eagle. He lifted the tortoise and carried her upside down until they were hidden in the clouds, and then he dropped her onto a mountaintop, completely smashing the shell she wore upon her back. As she breathed her last, the tortoise said, ‘It serves me right! What use did I have for clouds or for wings, when I already had trouble moving about on the ground!’

NOTE: For a quite different story about the eagle and the tortoise, see Fable 111. The Buddhist *Kacchapa-jataka* has some motifs in common with this fable: a tortoise wants to fly away with two

birds who are his friends, so the birds grip a stick between their beaks which the tortoise clings to with his mouth, but of course he cannot manage to keep quiet, and so he plunges to his death.

Fable 332 (Romulus Ang. 7 = Perry 650)

The Beetle in the Air

There was a beetle who came forth fully sated from his dungheap and saw an eagle flying high up in the air, crossing a great stretch of the sky in a brief stretch of time. The beetle then felt contempt for his own way of life and declared to his fellow beetles, 'Look at that eagle, who is so swift on the wing and so strongly built, equipped with such a savage beak and talons! If she wants, she can soar up to the clouds and plunge downwards as fast as she likes. Meanwhile, we beetles suffer from a sorry state of affairs, being not quite bugs and not quite birds. But my voice is no less pleasant than the eagle's cry, and her sheen does not outshine my own. I will not crawl around in the dung any more! From now on I will consort with the birds and fly around with them everywhere, joining their society!' The beetle then rose into the sky, emitting a song that was nothing more than a loathsome sort of buzzing. As he tried to follow the eagle into the upper air, he was unable to endure the strong winds. He fell to the ground, shaken and exhausted, far away from his home. Facing starvation, the sad beetle said, 'I don't care if they call me a bug or a bird, if only I can get back home to my dungheap!'

Disaster awaits the arrogant person who puts on airs: he will fail to get promoted and will lose his former position as well.

Fable 333 (Chambry 150* = Perry 116)

The Crab on Dry Land

A crab came up from out of the sea and was looking for food on the land. A hungry fox saw the crab, ran up, and grabbed him. As he was about to be eaten, the crab exclaimed, 'It serves me right! I am a creature of the sea but I wanted to live on dry land.'

The fable shows that people are bound to fail when they abandon their familiar pursuits and take up a business they know nothing about.

Fable 334 (Chambry 193 = Perry 139)

The Seagull and the Kite

A seagull swallowed a fish and ruptured his throat. When a kite saw the seagull lying dead on the beach, he remarked, 'It serves you right! You were born to fly in the air and instead you lived your life on the sea.'

Those who abandon their familiar trade and dedicate themselves to an unknown profession naturally come to a bad end.

Fable 335 (Aphthonius 40 = Perry 398)

The Raven and the Swan

A story about a raven, exhorting us to do what is natural to us.

The raven saw the swan and envied his white colour. Thinking that his own colour was due to the water in which he bathed, the raven abandoned the altars where he found his food and instead joined the swans in the swamps and the rivers. This did nothing at all to change the raven's colour, but he starved to death from a lack of food.

A change of habit cannot alter a person's nature.

NOTE: Compare the English proverb 'a crow is never the whiter for washing herself often' (John Ray, *English Proverbs* (1670), 121).

Fable 336 (Phaedrus 2.8 = Perry 492)

The Stag Among the Cattle

A stag had been hiding in the woods when he was discovered by some hunters. Hoping to escape certain death at their hands, he ran blindly in terror towards the nearest farmhouse and concealed himself in a convenient stall where the oxen were kept. One of the oxen said to the fugitive, 'You wretched creature, what on earth are you trying to do? You have sealed your own death warrant by trusting your life to the protection of a human house!' But the stag implored the oxen, 'Have mercy, I beg you! At the first opportunity, I'll run back out again.' The passing hours of the day gave way to night. A cowherd brought some leafy boughs into the stall but saw nothing amiss. The various farm workers came and went, but no one noticed a thing; the bailiff also passed through but even he didn't

observe anything out of the ordinary. The stag was delighted and began thanking the oxen who had kept quiet on his behalf and had extended such welcome hospitality in a moment of need. One of the oxen said to the stag, ‘We do indeed wish you all the best, but if the man of a hundred eyes should come, your life will hang in the balance.’ Meanwhile, after dinner, the master himself came to inspect the manger since he had noticed that the oxen had been looking rather sickly. ‘Why is there so little fodder here?’ he shouted. ‘And look, not enough bedding! And how much trouble would it be to get rid of these spider webs?’ As the master examined each and every thing, he also noticed the stag’s tall horns. He called his servants and ordered them to kill the stag and to carry his carcass away.

The fable shows that the master has better insight than anyone else when it comes to his own business.

FABLES ABOUT FOOLISH IMITATION

Fable 337 (Syntipas 46 = Perry 203)

The Monkey and the Fishing-net

A fisherman was catching fish by the sea. A monkey saw him, and wanted to imitate what he was doing. The man went away into a little cave to take a rest, leaving his net on the beach. The monkey came and grabbed the net, thinking that he too would go fishing. But since he didn’t know anything about it and had not had any training, the monkey got tangled up in the net, fell into the sea, and

was drowned. The fisherman seized the monkey when he was already done for and said, ‘You wretched creature! Your lack of judgement and stupid behaviour has cost you your life!’

This fable shows that people who try to imitate their superiors end up only destroying themselves.

Fable 338 (Ademar 17 = Perry 91)

The Donkey and the Pet Dog

A donkey used to see the master’s pet puppy dog fawning on him day in and day out. The puppy ate his fill of food from the master’s table and was also given many treats by the household servants. The donkey said to himself, ‘If my master and all the servants are so fond of that nasty little dog, then imagine what will happen if I do as the dog does. After all, I am better than a dog, much more talented and useful in so many ways! Yes, pure water from the sacred fountains will be mine to drink, and elegant food will be mine to eat, since I am far superior to that little dog. It is time for me to enjoy the finer things in life and to command the respect of everyone around me!’ As the donkey was reflecting on his situation, he saw the master coming in. He let out a great ‘hee-haw’ and quickly ran to meet him, leaping up and putting his two front feet on his master’s shoulders, licking the master with his tongue and tearing the master’s clothes with his hooves. The master collapsed under the donkey’s weight and at the sound of the master’s shout all the servants came running. They grabbed sticks and stones and

attacked the donkey, beating him senseless and breaking his back and his legs. Then they chased him off to the stables, exhausted and barely alive.

Unworthy people should not try to usurp the position of their superiors.

Fable 339 (Babrius 125 = Perry 359)

The Donkey on the Roof

A donkey went up on the top of a house and while he was frisking about he broke some of the roof tiles. A man came running up and dragged the donkey back down to the ground, beating him with a club. The donkey, his back aching from the blows, said to the man, 'But just yesterday and the day before you were so amused when the monkey did the very same thing!'

NOTE: 'The donkey on the roof' was a Latin proverb (e.g. Petronius, *Satyricon* 63.1), equivalent to our 'bull in a china shop'.

Fable 340 (Syntipas 1 = Perry 184)

The Donkey and the Cricket

A donkey heard the sound of a cricket chirping and he enjoyed the sound so much that he asked, 'What kind of food gives you that sweet-sounding voice?' The cricket replied, 'My food is the air and the dew.' The donkey thought that this diet would also make him sound like a cricket, so he clamped his mouth shut, letting in only

the air and having nothing but dew for his food. In the end, he died of hunger.

This fable shows that you must not act unnaturally, trying to achieve some impossible thing.

Fable 341 (Babrius 137 = Perry 2)

The Jackdaw and the Eagle

When an eagle seized a sleek and glossy lamb from the flock and carried it off in his talons as a feast for his chicks, the jackdaw decided to do the same thing. Accordingly, he swooped down and clutched at a lamb, but his claws got tangled in the wool on the lamb's back and he could not escape. The jackdaw said, 'It serves me right for being such a fool! Why should I, who am only a jackdaw, try to imitate eagles?'

> NOTE: For a different ending to this fable, see Fable 342 (following).

Fable 342 (Syntipas 9 = Perry 2)

The Jackdaw and the Eagle

There was a jackdaw who saw an eagle carry away a lamb from the flock. The jackdaw then wanted to do the very same thing himself. He spied a ram amidst the flock and tried to carry it off, but his talons got tangled in the wool. The shepherd then came and struck him on the head and killed him.

This fable shows that when someone lacking in strength tries to imitate someone stronger, he proves that he is not only weak but stupid, and his foolish behaviour can even put his life at risk.

NOTE: In a Greek prose version of this fable (Chambry 5), the shepherd captures the jackdaw and takes the bird home for his children to play with.

Fable 343 (Aphthonius 20 = Perry 394)

The Fox and the Lion Hunting

A story about a fox, exhorting us not to aim too high.

The fox lived together with a lion and acted as his servant. She would point out their quarry, while the lion would carry out the actual attack. Whatever the lion was able to catch was then divided between the two of them accordingly. The fox, however, was jealous because the lion got more to eat than she did, so she decided to go hunting on her own instead of just pointing out their quarry to the lion. But when the fox went to seize something from the flock, she was captured and killed by some hunters.

It is better to serve in safety than to rule in peril.

NOTE: This opposition between the fox and the lion was proverbial (e.g. Aristophanes, *Peace* 1189: 'lions at home and foxes in battle').

Fable 344 (Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1427 ff. = Perry 428)

The Chariot-driver

A man of Sybaris fell out of his chariot and hit his head on the ground, since he was not a very experienced driver. Another man who was a friend of his came up and said, ‘Everybody should stick to what he knows!’

NOTE: For another Sybaritic fable, see Fable 180.

Fable 345 (Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 33 = Perry 461)

The Eyes and the Honey

Aesop said that the eyes were distressed because they considered themselves the most worthy part of the body, yet they saw the mouth enjoying every possible pleasure, especially honey, the sweetest substance of all. Filled with resentment, the eyes complained to the man. But when the man put honey in his eyes, they felt a stinging pain and burst into tears, since they thought that the honey was harsh and unpleasant.

Fable 346 (Babrius 134 = Perry 362)

The Snake and His Tail

Once upon a time the tail of the snake decided that she would no longer follow the head which crept along in front. ‘It’s my turn to be the leader!’ said the tail. The other parts of the snake’s body said to the tail, ‘You wretched creature, why can’t you just keep quiet? How are you going to be our leader when you don’t have eyes or a nose,

the things that guide the limbs of animals when they move?' But the tail did not listen to the other members of the snake's body, and thus the rational was defeated by the irrational. The back now ruled the front and the tail took the lead, blindly trailing the whole body behind her. Finally the tail led the body into a deep stony hole, scraping its spine against the rocks. Then the stubborn thing began to fawn and beg, 'O head, my leader, please save us if you will! I have provoked a harmful quarrel with harmful results. If you will just put me back down where I was before, I will behave myself, so that you won't have to worry about me getting you into trouble ever again.'

NOTE: This story also appears in Plutarch, *Life of Agis* 2.

Fable 347 (Babrius 41 = Perry 371)

The Lizard and the Snake

They say that there was once a lizard who burst into pieces right down the middle when he was trying to equal the length of a snake.

You will hurt yourself and accomplish nothing if you try to imitate someone who is far better than you are.

Fable 348 (Chambry 33 = Perry 268)

The Earthworm and the Snake

An earthworm saw a snake stretched out and envied his length. The earthworm wanted to be as long as that snake, so he lay down

beside the snake and tried to extend himself. The worm stretched and stretched until he accidentally split into pieces.

This is what happens to someone who competes with his superiors: he destroys himself before he can equal them.

NOTE: Following Crusius as adopted by Perry, I have changed Chambry's *alopeks*, 'fox' to *skoleks*, 'earthworm.'

Fable 349 (Phaedrus 1.24 = Perry 376)

The Frog and the Ox

A poor man perishes when he tries to imitate rich and powerful people.

There was once a frog who noticed an ox standing in the meadow. The frog was seized by a jealous desire to equal the ox in size so she puffed herself up, inflating her wrinkled skin. She then asked her children if she was now bigger than the ox. They said that she was not. Once again she filled herself full of air, straining even harder than before, and asked her children which of the two of them was bigger. 'The ox is bigger,' said her children. The frog was finally so indignant that she tried even harder to puff herself up, but her body exploded and she fell down dead.

NOTE: Another version of this story (Babrius 28) begins with the ox stepping on one of the little frogs, crushing it underfoot, which is what brings the ox to the frog's attention.

FABLES ABOUT CHANGING ONE'S NATURE

Fable 350 (Babrius 32 = Perry 50)

Aphrodite and the Weasel

A weasel once fell in love with a handsome young man and the blessed goddess Aphrodite, the mother of desire, allowed the weasel to change her shape, so that she appeared to be a beautiful woman whom any man would be glad to take as his wife. As soon as the young man laid eyes on her, he also fell in love and wanted to marry her. While the wedding feast was in progress, a mouse ran by. The bride leaped up from her richly decorated couch and began to run after the mouse, thus bringing an end to the wedding. After having played his little joke, Eros took his leave: Nature had proved stronger than Love.

> NOTE: Eros is the Greek personification of Desire, like 'Cupid' in Latin. This story has much in common with the Greek proverb, 'weasels don't wear wedding gowns' (Zenobius 2.93, who directly associates this proverb with the Aesopic fable).

Fable 351 (Romulus ad Rufum 5.9 = Perry 107)

Jupiter and the Fox

No piece of luck can conceal a depraved nature.

Jupiter had turned the fox into the likeness of a human being and had seated her on the throne as his queen. But when the fox happened to notice a beetle creeping out from its hole, she leaped up and began chasing this familiar object of prey. The gods laughed

at the fox as she ran, while the great father of the gods blushed and renounced his relations with the fox. As he chased her out of the chamber, Jupiter said, ‘Live the life you deserve, since you clearly are not worthy of my favours!’

NOTE: In the Greek prose version (Chambry 119), it is Zeus himself who lets loose the beetle to test the fox’s transformation.

Fable 352 (Lucian, *Fisherman* 36 = Perry 463)

The Monkeys and the Pyrrhic Dance

They say that the king of Egypt once taught some monkeys how to dance the Pyrrhic dance. Since monkeys are creatures that readily imitate human behaviour, they quickly learned their lesson and did the dance, dressed in purple robes and masks. For a while everyone was impressed by the sight, until a more discerning member of the audience threw some nuts which he had in his pocket into the midst of the dancers. When the monkeys saw the nuts they forgot all about their performance; instead of dancing, they started acting like monkeys again. They crushed their masks and ripped their robes, fighting one other for the nutmeats. The whole pattern of the dance was thrown into confusion, much to the audience’s amusement.

NOTE: The Pyrrhic dance was a martial arts dance notorious for its wild gyrations.

Fable 353 (Babrius 80 = Perry 249)

The Camel and the Pyrrhic Dance

While he was out carousing, the owner of a camel ordered her to dance to the music of bronze cymbals and flutes. The camel refused and said, ‘I am lucky just to walk down the road without being laughed at: dancing the Pyrrhic is out of the question!’

Fable 354 (Chambry 306 = Perry 83)

The Monkey and the Camel

At the animal convention, the monkey got up and danced. He won great approval and was applauded by all. The camel was jealous and aspired to the same success so she also stood up and attempted to dance, making a complete fool of herself. The other animals grew angry and drove the camel away, beating her with clubs.

This fable is appropriate for jealous people who try to rival their superiors.

Fable 355 (Aphthonius 7 = Perry 140)

The Lion and the Farmer’s Daughter

A story about a lion and a young woman, which teaches us not to indulge our desires.

A lion who had fallen in love with a young woman went to the woman’s father to ask for her hand in marriage. The father was afraid to refuse the lion’s offer, but asked him first to have his teeth and claws taken out; otherwise the lion could only arouse his

daughter's terror. The lion was so in love with the woman that he agreed to the bargain. When the lion came back and approached the farmer, now naked and defenceless, the farmer clubbed him to death.

If you follow your enemies' advice, you will run into danger.

NOTE: See also the first-century BCE historian Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 19.25.

Fable 356 (Chambry 107* = Perry 97)

The Kid, the Wolf, and the Flute

A kid had wandered off from the flock and was being chased by a wolf. Unable to get away, the kid fell into the wolf's clutches, so she turned to him and said, 'I know for a fact that I am about to become your dinner, but I would like to die with dignity: please play the flute for me so that I can do a little dance.' The wolf played the flute and the kid danced to the music. The sound alerted the shepherd's dogs, who attacked the wolf and chased him away. As the wolf ran off he said to himself, 'It serves me right for trying to be a musician instead of a butcher!'

The story shows that being bested in a contest of words can induce bewilderment even in persons who are wicked by nature.

NOTE: For a similar fable about a foolish wolf who acts like a doctor instead of a butcher, see Fable 312.

Fable 357 (Chambry 64 = Perry 38)

The Farmer, the Wolf, and the Plough

A ploughman loosed his oxen from the yoke and led them away to be watered. Meanwhile, a hungry wolf, who was looking for something to eat, discovered the plough and started to lick the yoke straps where the oxen had been tied. The unsuspecting wolf slowly but surely slipped his neck beneath the yoke, until he was not able to pull it back out. He then started dragging the plough along the furrow. When the ploughman came back and saw what had happened, he said, 'O you wicked creature, if only you would give up your life of theft and crime in order to devote yourself entirely to farming!'

The same is true of wicked people: even when they promise to be on their good behaviour, no one believes them because of their bad habits.

NOTE: Compare the Greek proverb, 'the fox is pulling the plough' (Erasmus, *Adages* 2.6.28), which was used to refer to incongruous or absurd situations.

Fable 358 (Romulus Ang. 45 = Perry 676)

The Wolves and the Harvesters

Two wolves crossed paths one day and began to talk about the fact that they were an object of universal hatred. People would even start yelling at them when they had no intention of doing anything wrong. One of the wolves then said to the other, 'It's all because

they've never seen us do anything good! If the people saw us do them a favour even just once, then they would be more inclined to expect us to be good later on.' The second wolf asked, 'What good thing do you think we can do that will convince the people of our good behaviour?' The first wolf replied, 'Let's leave the woods and go into the fields where we can help the people gathering sheaves!' So the wolves came out of the woods and went into the fields and gathered the sheaves, just as they had planned. But as soon as the people saw the wolves in the field, they immediately chased them away, shouting and screaming. The wolves were surprised and said, 'What do they mean by shouting at us like that, when we are not doing any harm and only trying to help them?' The other wolf replied, 'Let's go back home and act as we did in the past. Whether we help the people or harass them, they are going to hate us just the same!'

Moral. The same is true of wicked people: when they do not get the reward and thanks they expect, they immediately put a stop to their good works.

Fable 359 (Odo 11 = Perry 590)

The Raven, the Stork, and His Beak

This fable shows that a change of place does not make you a saint.

There was once a stork who quarrelled with his wife and poked out her eye with his beak. The stork was ashamed at having inflicted such an injury on his wife, so he flew away to go and live

somewhere else. A raven ran into the stork and asked the reason for his journey. The stork said that he had poked out his wife's eye with his beak. The raven asked the stork, 'Is this the same beak that you have always had?' When the stork said it was, the raven then remarked, 'So what is the point of your running away if you carry your beak with you wherever you go?'

Fable 360 (Alexander Nequam 38 = Perry 590)

The Magpie and Her Tail

No matter how often the magpie settled down on a perch and folded her wings, her tail-feathers still kept on twitching. Hoping to rid herself of this habit by changing her homeland, she flew across no small stretch of the sea, but in vain. As soon as the magpie alighted on the distant shore, her tail-feathers started shaking as usual. The magpie then concluded, 'By changing my country I thought my habits would change, but I'm just as badly off as before, even though I have come to the other side of the world.'

Changing your location does not change your state of mind, and the person who wants to modify his character sails the seas in vain.

NOTE: Nequam's epimythium is based on the proverb made famous by Horace, *Epistles* 1.11.27: 'people who sail across the ocean change the sky overhead, but not their state of mind.' Alexander Nequam (or Neckam) was a late-twelfth-century scholar and writer who wrote a collection of Aesopic fables in verse.

Fable 361 (Syntipas 41 = Perry 393)

The Black Man in the River

Someone saw a black man from India washing himself in a river and said to him, 'You better keep still and not stir up the mud in the water, or you arc never going to turn that body of yours white!'

This fable shows that nothing in this world can change its nature.

NOTE: The Greek word *aethiops* literally meant 'with a face burnt by the sun', and was used to refer to dark-skinned peoples of both India and Africa. In the Greek prose version (Chambry 11), a man makes his Ethiopian slave sick by trving to wash off his colour. The paradox of 'washing the Ethiopian' is found in a number of Greek sources, including the proverb collections (e.g. Apostolius 1.71) and it also appears in the Bible, Jeremiah 13: 23: 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' (The Hebrew text here reads 'Cushite', although the Septuagint already reads 'Ethiopian' as does Jerome's Latin Vulgate.)

FABLES ABOUT AMBIGUOUS CREATURES

Fable 362 (Ignatius Diaconus, *Tetrasticha* 1.22 = Perry 418)

The Ostrich

War broke out between all the beasts and the birds. When the ostrich was captured, she fooled both sides by being both a bird and a beast: she showed the birds her head, and the beasts her feet.

You cannot trust a two-faced associate.

Fable 363 (Ademar 38 = Perry 566)

The War Between the Beasts and the Birds

The birds were at war with the beasts, and it was impossible to tell which side was winning and which was losing. Afraid to find himself on the losing side, the bat kept switching to the other side as soon as he thought it was going to prevail. Peace was eventually restored, and both the birds and the beasts realized that the bat had been a traitor. Found guilty of such a dastardly crime, the bat fled from the light and concealed himself in the dark shadows of the night.

People who try to take both sides in a dispute will be shamefully rejected by both of them; it is better not to make any enemies at all than to lose the battle.

NOTE: For another explanation of why the bat comes out only at night, see Fable 500.

Fable 364 (Chambry 251* = Perry 172)

The Bat and the Weasels

A bat had fallen to the ground, where a weasel grabbed her and was ready to kill her. The bat begged for mercy but the weasel refused, since weasels are the natural enemies of every kind of bird. The bat insisted that she was not a bird at all, but only a mouse, so the

weasel let her go. Later on, the bat fell to the ground again and was seized by another weasel. The bat also begged this weasel not to kill her, but the weasel refused, since there was a war between the mice and the weasels. The bat denied that she was a mouse, but only a bat, so once again the weasel let her go. As a result, the bat was able to save herself twice by changing her name.

Clearly we must not always stick to the same course all the time since people who change with the times are often able to escape even the greatest dangers.

NOTE: For another fable about the war between the weasels and the mice, see Fable 455.

Fable 365 (Chambry 341 = Perry 242)

The Fox and the Hyena

They say that hyenas change their nature every year, so that sometimes they are male and sometimes female. So when a hyena saw a fox and criticized her for having spurned her friendly overtures, the fox replied, 'Don't blame me! Blame your own nature, which makes it impossible for me to tell whether you would be my girlfriend or my boyfriend!'

This is a story for an ambiguous person.

NOTE: In Greek and Roman folklore, the hyena was believed to be a hermaphrodite (e.g. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.408 ff.).

Fable 366 (Chambry 340* = Perry 243)

The Two Hyenas

They say that the hyena has a double nature: for a period of time the hyena is male, and then later on she is female. The story goes that when a male hyena was treating a female badly, she said to him, 'Listen here: remember how things used to be, and don't forget that I will be a male hyena the next time around!'

The fable is a lesson for someone who is temporarily in a position of authority: people who have been judged in the past can later on be in a position to judge their former teachers.

Fable 367 (Babrius 54 = Perry 310)

The Eunuch and the Fortune-teller

A eunuch went to a fortune-teller to find out whether he would ever have children. The fortune-teller sacrificed an animal and spread out its liver for examination. He then said, 'When I look into the liver, I see that you will be a father, but when I look upon your face, you do not even appear to be a man!'

> NOTE: For another fable about a eunuch, see Fable 595. The practice of consulting the liver of an animal as a means of predicting the future was widespread in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Fable 368 (Avianus 29 = Perry 35)

The Satyr and His Guest

As winter grew rough with heavy frost and every field stiffened as the ice grew hard, a traveller was brought to a halt by thickening fog. He could no longer sec the trail in front of him, making it impossible to go on. A satyr, one of the guardians of the woods, is said to have taken pity on the man and offered him shelter in his cave. This child of the fields was then amazed by the man and terrified by his prodigious powers. First, in order to restore his frozen limbs to life's activities, the man thawed his hands by blowing hot air on them from his mouth. Then, when the man had begun to get warm and was eager to enjoy his host's extravagant hospitality (for the satyr wanted to show the man how country folk lived, offering him the forest's finest products), he brought out a full bowl of warm wine whose heat could spread throughout the man's body and dispel the winter's chill. But the man hesitated to touch the steaming cup with his lips and this time his mouth emitted a cooling breath. The man's host shook with terror, dumbfounded at this double portent. The satyr drove his guest out into the woods and ordered him to be on his way. 'Do not let any man ever come near my cave again,' said the satyr, 'if he can breathe in two different ways from the very same mouth!'

NOTE: Satyrs were mythical creatures who were part human and part animal. They were usually represented as men with the legs and tail of a goat, or sometimes the tail of a horse.

FABLES ABOUT ANIMAL HYPOCRISY

Fable 369 (Aphthonius 11 = Perry 322)

The Crab and His Mother

A story about a crab, urging us not to advise things that are impossible.

The crab's mother said to him, 'My son, why do you walk in a crooked line when you should be walking straight ahead?' The crab said to her, 'O mother, lead the way, and I will try to walk accordingly.' The crab's mother was unable to walk in a straight line, and her son accused her of being out of her mind.

It is easier to advocate an impossible task than to accomplish it.

NOTE: A proverb about the crab's walk is found in Aristophanes, *Peace* 1083: 'you will never be able to make a crab walk straight.'

Fable 370 (Romulus 1.18 = Perry 324)

The Kite and His Mother

If someone is always blaspheming, what can he expect in times of trouble? Let us consider the fable on this subject proposed by our author.

The kite was sick and had spent many months in bed. When there was no longer any hope of his recovery, he tearfully asked his mother to make the rounds of all the shrines and to offer great vows for his recovery. 'I will do what you want, my son, but I am afraid that I will not succeed. It scares and worries me, my child: since you pillaged all the temples and polluted all the altars, showing no

reverence for the holy sacrifices, what can I pray for now on your behalf?'

This is a fable that should be heeded by those criminals who dare to visit the holy shrines while still bearing the stains of their sin. They need to busy themselves with good works, making every effort to efface their evil deeds.

NOTE: For a quite different fable about a human mother and her criminal son, see Fable 496.

Fable 371 (Chambry 228* = Perry 348)

The Donkey and the Wolves

There was a wolf who ruled over the other wolves and decreed that whatever they might catch while hunting would be kept in common and divided equally by the whole pack. A donkey who happened to be passing by remarked, 'What a fine idea from the mind of a wolf! But how is it that yesterday I ran into you and saw you hiding your quarry away in your lair?' Put to shame by the donkey, the wolf abolished the law he had made.

Fable 372 (Syntipas 6 = Perry 404)

The Hunter and the Wolf

A certain hunter saw a wolf attacking a flock and tearing to pieces as many of the sheep as he could. The hunter skilfully hunted down the wolf and set his dogs on him. Then he shouted at the wolf, 'O

you terrible beast, where is that former strength of yours? You cannot even withstand the attack of these dogs!'

This fable shows that each man makes his reputation in the field which is his specialty.

Fable 373 (Chambry 36 = Perry 41)

The Fox, the Lamb, and the Dog

A fox entered a flock of sheep, seized one of the suckling lambs, and pretended to kiss it. A dog asked the fox what she was doing. 'I'm hugging and playing with the lamb,' said the fox. The dog replied, 'Well, you'd better let go of that lamb, or I'll play the dogs' game with you!'

This fable is suitable for an unscrupulous and foolish man who wants to be a thief.

Fable 374 (Syntipas 50 = Perry 136)

The Dog and the Hare

A dog was running after a hare, and when he caught him he would alternately bite the hare and then lick the blood that flowed from the wound. The hare thought that the dog was kissing him, so he said, 'You should either embrace me as a friend, or bite me like an enemy.'

This fable shows that some people make an outward show of friendship but inwardly they are filled with wickedness and hostility.

Fable 375 (Babrius 14 = Perry 288)

The Bear and the Fox

The bear boasted that he was exceptionally fond of mankind since, as he explained, bears don't pull dead people's bodies to pieces. The fox remarked, 'I'd prefer that you mangled the dead ones, if you'd leave the living alone!'

> NOTE: An epimythiurn probably added by a later editor reads: 'If someone injures me while I am alive, do not let him weep over me when I am dead.'

Fable 376 (Syntipas 11 = Perry 414)

The Lioness and the Wild Boar

A bull found a lion lying asleep and gored him with his horns until he was dead. The lion's mother showed up and wept bitterly over her son. When the wild boar saw the mother lion lamenting, he stood at a safe distance and said, 'Oh, how many people are also weeping at this very moment because their sons have been killed by you lions!'

This fable shows that what you have done to others will likewise be done to you, according to the same measure.

Fable 377 (Chambry 271 = Perry 189)

The Donkey and the Frogs

A donkey was carrying a load of wood across a swamp when he slipped and fell into the water. Unable to get up, the donkey began to weep and moan. When the frogs who lived in the swamp heard the donkey complaining, they said, ‘Hey you! What would you do if you had to spend as much time here as we do, given that you make such a fuss about having fallen in for just a few minutes?’

A person who easily endures great hardships can use this fable to reproach a lazy person who is put out by the least inconvenience.

Fable 378 (Phaedrus 1.22 = Perry 293)

The Man and the Weasel

A man caught a weasel but the weasel, hoping to escape her imminent demise, pleaded with the man. ‘Spare me, please,’ she said, ‘since I am the creature who rids your house of pesky mice.’ ‘If you chased those mice on my behalf,’ replied the man, ‘I would be grateful indeed and would spare you. But the fact is that you do the work in order to enjoy the remains of what the mice are going to nibble, and also eat the mice themselves. So don’t expect any gratitude from me for your so-called favours!’ With these words, the man consigned the treacherous creature to her doom.

You should recognize that this is a story about you, if you are the sort of person who takes care of your own private business while vainly boasting to gullible people that you are doing them a favour.

NOTE: For a similar fable about the cat, the mice, and the cheese, see Fable 435.

Fable 379 (Romulus Mon. 18 = Perry 657)

The Farmer, the Cattle, and the Manure

A certain farmer was using his cattle to haul manure out of the stables. The cattle complained to the farmer that their labour allowed him to harvest his wheat and barley crops, supplying his household with ample food year in and year out. Therefore, said the cattle, it was hardly fair for them to have to perform the vile task of hauling manure out of the stables. The farmer then asked, 'Is it not the case that you yourselves are the source of the substance which you are now carrying away?' The cattle replied, 'Yes, that is true.' The farmer then concluded, 'So, since you are the ones who made a mess of the stable in your spare time, it is only right that you should also make some effort to clean it up!'

The same is true of grumbling, arrogant servants: they never stop reproaching their master if they have done him some good service, heedless of the rewards that have been bestowed on them, and they would like it if all of their failures were passed over in silence.

Fable 380 (Syntipas 16 = Perry 415)

The Dog and the Blacksmiths

There was a dog living in the house of some blacksmiths. When the blacksmiths were working, the dog would go to sleep, but when

they sat down to a meal he would wake up and approach his masters in a friendly fashion. The blacksmiths said to the dog, ‘How is that you sleep undisturbed when our heaviest hammers are clanging away, but you are immediately awakened by the slightest sound of our teeth chewing?’

This fable shows that even inattentive people quickly notice anything that they think will benefit them, while they are completely unaware of things which are not their immediate concern.

Fable 381 (Chambry 312* = Perry 206)

The Shepherd, the Dog, and the Sick Sheep

A shepherd had a whelp that he fed on dead or dying sheep. One day he saw this dog standing near a sick lamb, looking sad and seeming to weep. The shepherd urged him to put a stop to this ostentation. ‘You put on a fine show of sympathy!’ he said to the dog. ‘But let’s hope instead that what you want is not going to happen after all.’

The fable shows that in the same way every heir to property pretends to sympathize with the sick man by making a hollow show of weeping.

Fable 382 (Babrius 42 = Perry 328)

The Cook and the Dog

Someone was hosting a splendid feast in the city after having performed a sacrifice. A dog belonging to the host ran into another man’s dog who was a friend of his and invited him to come to the

feast. The other dog came but the cook grabbed him by the leg and threw him out over the wall and into the street. When some other dogs asked him how the party had gone, the dog answered, ‘Couldn’t have been better! I can’t even quite tell how I made my exit.’

Fable 383 (Chambry 29 = Perry 232)

The Foxes at the River

There were once some foxes who had gathered together on the banks of the River Meander looking for a drink of water. They urged one another to approach the river, but no one dared to get too close because of the rushing current. Then one of the foxes came forward in order to embarrass her fellow foxes. Laughing at their cowardice and convinced that she was braver than the rest, she boldly leaped into the water. As the current carried her out into the middle of the river her companions stood on the riverbank and shouted at her, ‘Don’t leave us! Come back and show us how to get down to the water so that we can also take a drink.’ The fox replied as she was being swept downstream, ‘I’ve got a message to take to Miletus, and I need to carry it there; when I come back I will show you!’

This is a story for people who get themselves into trouble because of their boasting.

NOTE: Miletus was a Greek city near the mouth of the River Meander in western Anatolia (modern Turkey).

FABLES ABOUT HUMAN HYPOCRISY

Fable 384 (Phaedrus 5.1 = Perry 523)

Demetrius and Menander

King Demetrius of Phalerum had seized control of Athens unlawfully. As is the general custom, the people all came rushing, vying with one another to salute the victor. The most prominent citizens kissed the hand which had caught them in its clutches, while silently bemoaning this grievous reversal of fortune. Not even the retired gentlemen and men of leisure were absent, although they came creeping in last of all simply in order to have their attendance duly noted. Among them was Menander, famous for his comedies. Demetrius had read his work, and although he did not know Menander personally, he admired the man's poetic genius. Menander made his entrance on dainty, dawdling footsteps, reeking of perfume and dressed in flowing robes. When the king noticed him at the end of the line, he said, 'Who is that faggot, and how dare he strut about like that in my presence!' The men standing next to him replied, 'That is Menander, the poet.' Demetrius abruptly changed his demeanor and said, 'Why, no man could be more handsome!'

NOTE: Demetrius of Phalerum had been appointed governor of Athens in 317 BCE and was himself a man of letters, no doubt well acquainted with the contemporary playwright Menander. A few years later, in 307 BCE, Demetrius Poliorcetes seized power and Demetrius of Phalerum went into exile. Phaedrus seems to have

conflated Demetrius of Phalerum with Demetrius Poliorcetes in this story.

Fable 385 (Babrius 83 = Perry 319)

The Horse and His Groom

There was a groom who used to sell his horse's barley to the innkeepers and drink all evening long. He would then spend the whole next day combing and currying the horse. The horse said to the groom, 'If you really want me to look good, then don't sell the food that nourishes me!'

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: 'Someone who wants to help his friend must give him what is essential and appropriate. No fancy decorations can help someone who lacks life's basic necessities.'

Fable 386 (Babrius 51 = Perry 212)

The Widow and Her Sheep

There was once a widow who kept a sheep at home. Wanting to gather more wool, she sheared the sheep awkwardly, clipping the wool so close to the flesh that she made the sheep bleed. Smarting with pain, the sheep said to the woman, 'Please stop torturing me! Will my blood really add so much to the weight of the wool? If it is my flesh that you want, mistress, there is a butcher who will be able

to put me to death quickly; but if it is my wool you want, rather than my flesh, then the shearer can clip me without killing me.'

NOTE: Compare a proverb reportedly used by the emperor Tiberius (d. 37 CE), as reported by Suetonius, *Life of Tiberius* 32: 'Good shepherds shear their flock; they do not flay them.'

Fable 387 (Phaedrus *App*. 28 = Perry 22)

The Hare and the Cowherd

A swift-footed hare was fleeing from a hunter. A cowherd happened to see where the hare had concealed himself in a thicket. The hare then said to the cowherd, 'I beg you by the power of the gods on high and all that you hold dear, do not give me away! I have never done any harm to this field.' The cowherd replied, 'Do not be afraid! Hide yourself, and do not worry.' Then the hunter arrived hot on the trail of the hare, shouting, 'Hey there, cowherd, did a hare happen to come this way?' 'He did,' said the cowherd, 'but then he ran off that way, to the left.' Yet as he spoke, the cowherd actually turned his head to the right and winked. The hunter did not take the hint and quickly vanished out of sight. At this point the cowherd said to the hare, 'So, are you going to thank me for having concealed you?' The hare replied, 'Well, I cannot deny that I am grateful to your tongue, many thanks. But as for your lying eyes, I wish someone would just rip them right out of your head!'

NOTE: In the Greek tradition (e.g. Chambry 34), the story is told about a fox, not a hare. In the Latin tradition, represented here, Phaedrus' *lepus*, 'hare', became a *lupus*, 'wolf', in later Latin texts.

Fable 388 (Phaedrus 5.10 = Perry 532)

The Old Dog and His Master

There was a dog who had been swift and strong when attacking all kinds of wild beasts, never failing to do what his master wanted, but now he found himself beginning to grow feeble under the burden of old age. On one occasion he was sent forward to fight with a bristling boar. The dog seized the boar by the ear, but the weak grip of his decaying teeth allowed the quarry to get away. The hunter was angry and scolded the dog. The stalwart old hound said to the man in reply, 'I did not fail you in spirit, only in strength. Praise me for what I once was, even if you must condemn me for what I am now!'

Philetus, you can clearly see why I have written this story.

NOTE: Phaedrus makes no other reference to this 'Philetus'. For another fable which Phaedrus seems to imbue with cryptic personal meaning, see Fable 572, the story of the old woman and the wine jar.

Fable 389 (Aphthonius 5 = Perry 280)

The Goatherd and the Goat

A story about a goat, urging us not to try to conceal something obvious.

A goatherd tried to induce a goat who had strayed from the flock to join the other goats. He was not able to accomplish anything by shouting or whistling, so he threw a rock at the goat, and the rock broke one of her horns. The goatherd begged the goat not to tell the master what had happened, but the goat replied, 'You must be the stupidest goatherd in the world! The horn itself will proclaim the deed, even if I remain silent.'

Only an utter fool would try to hide what is obvious for all to see.

Fable 390 (Chambry 274 = Perry 190)

The Wolf and the Raven

A donkey who had a sore on his back was grazing in a meadow. A raven alighted on his back and began to peck at the wound, while the donkey brayed and reared up on his hind legs in pain. The donkey's driver, meanwhile, stood off at a distance and laughed. A wolf who was passing by saw the whole thing and said to himself, 'How unfairly we wolves are treated! When people so much as catch a glimpse of us, they drive us away, but when someone like that raven makes his move, everyone just smiles at him.'

The fable shows that even before they act, dangerous people can be recognized at a distance.

NOTE: L'Estrange provides a delightful epimythium: 'One Man may better Steal a Horse, than Another Look over the Hedge.'

Fable 391 (Romulus Ang. 49 = Perry 670)

The Wolf, the Raven, and the Ram

A wolf once saw a raven sitting on a ram. The wolf sighed deeply and said, ‘That raven is a happy fellow, born under a lucky star! Wherever he sits, whatever he says, whatever he does, nobody criticizes him in any way. But if I were to clamber up on a ram like that, anyone who saw me would start shouting and hurry to chase me away—as if they had the ram’s best interests at heart!’

The unjust man is envious of anyone else’s good fortune. Even if he is aware of his own failings, he nevertheless feels sorry for himself when he sees others enjoying the things he cannot have.

Fable 392 (Plutarch, *Banquet of the Seven Sages* 13.156a = Perry 453)

The Shepherds, the Lamb, and the Wolf

This is one of Aesop’s fables. A wolf saw some shepherds eating a lamb in their tent. He approached the shepherds and said, ‘Why, what a great uproar there would be if I were to do the same thing!’

Fable 393 (Babrius 110 = Perry 330)

The Dog and Her Master

A man who was about to go on a journey said to his dog, who was standing beside him, ‘Why are you just standing there with your mouth hanging open? Get yourself ready, you’re going to go with

me.’ The dog wagged her tail, fawning on her master as she said, ‘I am all ready to go; you are the one who’s delaying!’

Fable 394 (Phaedrus *App*. 17 = Perry 545)

Aesop and His Ugly Mistress

Aesop was once the slave of an ugly woman who wasted entire days adorning herself with make-up, but even with all her fancy clothes and pearls and silver and gold she still could not find anyone who would so much as touch her. ‘Might I say a few words?’ asked Aesop. ‘Go ahead’, she replied. ‘I think that you could achieve all your hopes and dreams,’ said Aesop, ‘if only you would put aside this finery.’ ‘Do you really find me so much more attractive when I’m just my sweet little old self?’ she asked. ‘Quite the opposite,’ said Aesop, ‘but if you stopped giving your jewellery away, you could give your bedsprings a break.’ ‘I’m going to break every bone in your body!’ she answered back, and ordered them to beat the indiscreet slave with whips. Shortly thereafter, a thief stole one of the mistress’s silver bracelets. When she was told that the bracelet was nowhere to be found, the mistress was enraged and summoned all the slaves, threatening them with painful punishments if they didn’t tell the truth. ‘Threaten the others,’ said Aesop, ‘but you aren’t going to fool me, my mistress: it’s because I told the truth just now that you had me whipped and beaten!’

NOTE: For another fable about the dangers of telling the truth, see Fable 108.

FABLES ABOUT SELF-INTEREST

Fable 395 (Chambry 310* = Perry 205)

The Daughter and the Hired Mourners

There was a rich man who had two daughters, but one of his daughters died. He hired some women to do the mourning and they let loose a whole chorus of weeping. The other daughter remarked to her mother, 'We are surely wretched women if we cannot come up with a lament for our own loss, while these women, who are not even members of the family, beat their breasts and grieve so deeply.' The mother replied, 'Don't be surprised, my child: they do it for the money!'

Fable 396 (Babrius 69 = Perry 331)

The Dog, the Hare, and the Goatherd

A dog who was not unwise in the ways of the hunt had stirred up a furry-footed hare from behind a bush. He set off in pursuit of the hare, but the hare outran him. One of the goatherds scoffed at the dog and said, 'That hare's only a little fellow, but he turned out to be faster than you.' The dog replied, 'It's one thing if you are running in a hurry because you want to catch someone, but it's another thing entirely if you are running for your life!'

Fable 397 (Aphthonius 30 = Perry 85)

The Sheep, the Goat, and the Sow

A story about a sow, teaching us to give each man his due.

A man had rounded up a sow, a goat, and a sheep from his farm. While the donkey carried them all to the city, the goat and the sheep settled down quietly, but the sow's screams bothered their chauffeur, so the donkey said to the sow, 'Why on earth can't you go along quietly like the others?' The sow replied, 'The goat is being brought here for her milk, the sheep for his wool, but for me this is a matter of life and death!'

Each man has his own reason for acting as he does.

> NOTE: There is a similar observation in the *Life of Aesop* 48, when Aesop explains why the sheep is silent when being led to slaughter but the pig squeals: the sheep is accustomed to being milked or being sheared, so she does not expect the fate that awaits her, while the pig knows only one reason for being taken away.

Fable 398 (Chambry 41* = Perry 17)

The Foxes and Their Tails

A fox got caught in a trap and part of her tail was cut off as she escaped. She was so ashamed that she didn't think life was worth living. Then she realized that if she could persuade the other foxes to do the same thing her own shame would be hidden, as it would be shared by all the foxes. Accordingly, she summoned the other foxes and asked them to cut off their tails, maintaining that this was

the one part of their body that was unseemly, nothing but an extra appendage which they had to carry around. One of the other foxes scoffed in reply, ‘If it weren’t for the fact that it is in your interest to do this thing, you never would have proposed it!’

The story shows that wicked people do not give advice to their neighbours about what to do because of good-will, but because of their own self-interest.

NOTE: The story of the fox with the docked tail is alluded to by Plutarch, *Life of Themistocks* 1.

Fable 399 (Chambry 225 = Perry 154)

The Wolf, the Horse, and the Barley

As he was crossing through a field, a wolf found some barley. Since wolves don’t eat barley, he ignored it and continued on his way. The wolf then ran into a horse. He led the horse into the field and showed him the barley, saying that instead of eating the barley himself, he had saved it for the horse, since he liked to hear the sound of the horse’s teeth grinding together. The horse then said to the wolf, ‘Look here, if you wolves ate barley, you would never have put the pleasure of your ears before your stomach!’

The fable shows that nobody believes people who are inherently wicked, even if they pretend to be good-natured.

Fable 400 (Chambry 276 = Perry 264)

The Donkey, the Dog, and the Letter

A donkey and a dog were journeying together when they found a sealed letter on the ground. The donkey took the letter, broke the seals, and opened it. The donkey then began to read the letter aloud, while the dog sat there listening. The letter happened to be about food, that is, about barley and straw and hay. As the donkey was reading, the dog grew impatient, and finally he said to the donkey, 'You can skip that part, my dear; perhaps further down you will find some information about meat and bones.' The donkey scanned the rest of the letter but he didn't find what the dog was looking for. The dog then said to the donkey, 'Throw it back on the ground; it has nothing to offer!'

The story shows that different people are interested in different things.

NOTE: Compare the Greek proverb 'to give straw to a dog, bones to a donkey' (see Erasmus, *Adages* 3.5.14).

Fable 401 (Odo 32)

The Bees and the Beetles

Against people who enjoy only carnal pleasures.

Once upon a time, the bees invited the beetles to dinner. The beetles arrived, and when dinner was served the bees offered the beetles some honey and honeycomb. The beetles barely ate anything and then flew away. Next the beetles invited the bees, and when dinner was served, they offered the bees a plate full of dung. The bees

wouldn't eat even a single bite and instead they flew straight back home.

NOTE: For the proverbial opposition between beetles and honey, see Erasmus, *Adages* 4.8.17: 'faster than a beetle makes honey.'

Fable 402 (Odo 30a)

The Pig and the Wolf

Once upon a time, the lion held a banquet for all the other animals. He invited every possible creature and gave them all kinds of meat dishes to eat and many other fine foods. When the party was over, the animals went back to their homes. Along the way, the wolf Ysengrimus found the pig eating some swill. The pig said, 'Where have you been, wolf?' The wolf said, 'I'm on my way home from the lion's royal banquet. And what about you: weren't you there too?' The pig asked, 'Were there nice things to eat and many fine foods?' The wolf replied, 'Yes indeed: there were many wonderful dishes, very well prepared.' The pig asked, 'Was there swill to eat? And chaff?' The wolf exclaimed, 'What are you talking about, you wretched creature! God forbid there would be such vile stuff placed on the table at a banquet like that!'

NOTE: The name of the wolf, Ysengrimus, is taken from the medieval beast epic tradition (in other fables, Odo uses beast-epic names for the fox, Reinardus, and the cat, Tebertus).

Fable 403 (Phaedrus 3.12 = Perry 503)

The Rooster and the Pearl

A young rooster was looking for food in the manure when he found a pearl. ‘What a fine thing you are,’ he exclaimed, ‘and in what an unfortunate situation! If a person longing to possess something of such value had found you, you would have been restored to your original splendour. Yet it is I who have found you, when I would have much preferred to find some food instead. So this isn’t going to do you any good, and it doesn’t do me any good either!’

This is a story I tell for people who do not know how to appreciate me.

NOTE: Erasmus (*Adages* 4.8.38) notes the similarity between this fable and a saying attributed to Heraclitus by Aristotle: ‘as Heraclitus says, a donkey would prefer chaff to gold since donkeys get more pleasure from food than from gold’ (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1176[a]).

Fable 404 (Phaedrus *App*. 14 = Perry 542)

The Donkey and the Lyre

A donkey saw a lyre lying in a field. He approached the instrument, and as he tried to strum it with his hoof, the strings resounded at his touch. ‘What a beautiful thing,’ said the donkey, ‘but completely inappropriate, since I don’t know anything about music. If only someone better equipped than myself had found it, my ears would have been delighted by heavenly melodies!’

So it is that talents often go to waste because of some misfortune.

NOTE: It seems likely that Phaedrus invented this fable based on the widely known Greek proverb: *onos luras*, 'the donkey, the lyre'. The abbreviated proverb has the donkey as the subject of the verb and the lyre as the object, and it is usually assumed that the donkey is 'listening' to the lyre (for example, Lucian, *Against the Unlearned* 4: 'you listen to the lyre like a donkey, moving your ears'). In this case, however, Phaedrus' donkey wants to play the lyre (compare Lucian, *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 14: *onos autolurizon*, 'a donkey playing the lyre').

FABLES ABOUT WEALTH AND RICHES

Fable 405 (Phaedrus 1.27 = Perry 483)

The Dog and the Treasure

This is a story that can be applied to greedy people and to people who badly want to join the upper classes despite their humble origins.

While digging up dead people's bones, a dog uncovered a treasure. This outraged the spirits of the dead, and the dog was punished for his sacrilege by being stricken with a desire for wealth. Thus, while the dog stood there guarding the treasure, he took no thought for food and wasted away from starvation. A vulture perched above him is rumoured to have said, 'O you dog, you deserve to die, since all of a sudden you began to crave the wealth of a king even though you were conceived in the gutter and were raised on a dungheap!'

Fable 406 (Phaedrus 4.21 = Perry 518)

The Fox and the Dragon

While excavating her den, a fox dug a hole in the earth, and as she made deeper and deeper tunnels in the ground, she finally reached the cave of a dragon who was guarding a hidden treasure. When the fox saw the dragon, she said, 'First of all, I beg your pardon for this carelessness on my part; second, you no doubt realize that gold means nothing to me, so I hope that you will be so kind as to explain to me what profit you gain from this work, and what reward could be so great that you would forgo the pleasure of sleep and live out your life here in the dark?' 'I have no reward,' the dragon replied, 'but this task was assigned to me by Jupiter on high.' 'Does that mean you take nothing for yourself and do not give anything to anyone?' 'That is what the Fates have decreed.' 'Please don't be angry then if I speak freely,' concluded the fox, 'but someone who lives like this must have been born under an unlucky star!'

Since you will soon depart to that place where those before you have gone, why do you miserably torment yourself, blind to the truth? Yes, I am speaking to you, you miser, who make your future heirs rejoice while depriving the gods of incense and depriving yourself of food, you who are gloomy when you hear the melody of the lyre, in agony when you hear the joyful sounds of the flute, groaning at the cost of food. You stingy man, you save every penny for your estate, burdening heaven with promises you do not mean to keep, while you cut back on every possible

funeral expense so that not even Libitina, the goddess of undertakers, will profit from your death!

NOTE: Libitina was the Roman goddess of corpses, funerals, and undertakers, and death certificates were kept in her temples.

Fable 407 (Chambry 344* = Perry 225)

The Man and His Gold

There was a miser who sold his property and bought a lump of gold. The man then buried his gold just outside the city walls, where he constantly went to visit and inspect it. One of the workmen noticed the man's behaviour and suspected the truth. Accordingly, after the man had gone away, he took the gold. When the man came back and found that the hiding-place was empty, he began to cry and tear his hair. Someone saw the man's extravagant grief and asked him what was wrong. Then he said to the man, 'Enough of your grieving! Take a stone and put it where the gold was, and make believe the gold is still there: it's not as if you ever made any use of it!'

The story shows that there is no point in owning something unless you put it to good use.

Fable 408 (Ademar 13 = Perry 352)

The City Mouse and the Country Mouse

A city mouse once happened to pay a visit to the house of a country mouse where he was served a humble meal of acorns. The city mouse finished his business in the country, and by means of insistent invitations he persuaded the country mouse to come pay him a visit. The city mouse then brought the country mouse into a room that was overflowing with food. As they were feasting on various delicacies, a butler opened the door. The city mouse quickly concealed himself in a familiar mouse-hole, but the poor country mouse was not acquainted with the house and frantically scurried around the floorboards, frightened out of his wits. When the butler had taken what he needed, he closed the door behind him. The city mouse then urged the country mouse to sit back down to dinner. The country mouse refused and said, 'How could I possibly do that? Oh, how scared I am! Do you think that the man is going to come back?' This was all that the terrified mouse was able to say. The city mouse insisted, 'My dear fellow, you could never find such delicious food as this anywhere else in the world.' 'Acorns are enough for me,' the country mouse maintained, 'so long as I am secure in my freedom!'

It is better to live in self-sufficient poverty than to be tormented by the worries of wealth.

NOTE: There is a famous version of this fable in Horace, *Satires* 1.6.

Fable 409 (Charnbry 179* = Perry 329)

The Circus Dog and the Street Dogs

A dog who was being trained to fight in the public games snapped the collar around his neck and went dashing through the streets. The street dogs could tell that this fellow had been living the good life since he was as stout as a bull, so they asked him why he was running away. The runaway replied, ‘It’s true that I have been enjoying an abundance of food and living a comfortable life, but I am also forced to fight with lions and bears, risking my life in the arena.’ The other dogs then said to one another, ‘Our poor life must be very fine, because we don’t have to fight with lions and bears!’

Fable 410 (Syntipas 29 = Perry 357)

The Donkey, the Horse, and the War

A donkey and a horse belonged to the same man, and each of them did his duty. But the horse was granted many special privileges: he had plenty of food to eat, his flowing mane was braided and decorated, and his grooms washed him down with water each and every day. The donkey, on the other hand, was always bent down under the weight of the burdens he had to carry. Then one day the horse’s owner mounted him and rode off into battle. In the clash of opposing forces, the horse was wounded on more than one occasion. When the donkey saw how the horse had been degraded, he congratulated himself on his hard-working life of labour.

The fable shows that an impoverished life free from fear is much to be preferred to wealth and all its dangers.

NOTE: This same fable appears in Rumi, *Mathnawi* 5.2361 ff.

Fable 411 (Phaedrus 2.7 = Perry 491)

The Two Mules

Two mules were walking along, weighed down by two different loads: one mule was laden with bags full of money, while the other mule was carrying sacks stuffed with barley. The mule who was flush with money proudly lifted his head, tossing the little bell on his neck back and forth, while his companion simply followed along at a calm and quiet pace. All of a sudden, the mules were set upon by robbers who attacked them from an ambush. In the violent struggle, the rich mule was slashed with a sword and the robbers stole his money, yet they paid no attention at all to the worthless barley. When the mule who had lost all his riches began to complain, the other mule declared, 'As for me, I am quite content to have been treated with contempt: it means that I suffered no injury and lost none of my possessions!'

This fable proves that there is little risk in being poor, while being rich can get you into trouble.

Fable 412 (Phaedrus 4.23 = Perry 519)

Simonides and the Shipwreck

A learned man always has rich inner resources.

Simonides, that extraordinary author of lyric poems, found an excellent remedy for his straitened circumstances by travelling

around the most famous cities of Asia, singing the praises of victorious athletes in exchange for a fee. When he had grown wealthy in this venture, he was ready to take a sea voyage and go back to his native land (he was born, so they say, on the island of Ceos). He boarded a ship, but a terrible storm (plus the sheer age of the ship) caused it to sink in the middle of the sea. Some of the passengers grabbed their money-belts, while others held on to their valuables and any possible means of subsistence. A passenger who was more curious than the rest asked the poet, 'Simonides, why aren't you taking along any of your own stuff?' He replied, 'All that is mine is right here with me.' It turned out that only a few were able to swim ashore, while the majority drowned, weighed down by what they were carrying. Then bandits arrived and took from the survivors whatever they had brought ashore, stripping them naked. As it happened, the ancient city of Clazomenae was not far off, which is where the shipwrecked people then turned. In this city there lived a man inclined to literary pursuits who had often read Simonides' compositions and who was his great admirer from afar. He recognized Simonides simply from his manner of speaking and eagerly invited him to his house, regaling him with clothes and money and servants. Meanwhile, the rest of the survivors carried around placards, begging for food. When Simonides happened to run into them, he took one look and exclaimed, 'Just as I said: all that is mine is right here with me, but everything that you took with you has now vanished.'

NOTE: The shipwreck survivors of ancient Greece would carry around placards that described (or depicted) the cause of their misfortune. Clazomenae was an Ionian Greek city, located near Smyrna (modern Izmir, in Turkey). The Latin proverb *omnia mea mecum porto* (literally, 'everything that is mine I carry with me') is also associated with the philosopher Stilpo (see Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius* 9.13) and with Bias, one of the legendary seven sages of ancient Greece (Valerius Maximus, 7.2.3).

Fable 413 (Phaedrus 4.12 = Perry 111)

Hercules and Plutus

Riches are justly hated by courageous people: coffers of cash put a stop to honest traffic in praise.

Thanks to his excellent qualities, Hercules was received into heaven. He saluted the gods who came to congratulate him one after another, but when he was approached by Plutus, the god of wealth and the son of Fortune, Hercules turned his eyes aside. Father Jupiter asked him why he did this. Hercules answered, 'I hate the god of riches: he is a friend to the wicked who corrupts the entire world by throwing his money around!'

NOTE: Hercules, the son of Jupiter and his lover Alcmena, was granted divine honours after his death and lived in heaven among the gods.

Fable 414 (Phaedrus 5.4 = Perry 526)

The Pig, the Donkey, and the Barley

There was a man who had vowed that he would sacrifice a pig in honour of Hercules if the god agreed to rescue him from danger. When the man fulfilled his vow and sacrificed the pig, he then ordered that the pig's leftover barley be given to the donkey. The donkey, however, refused to touch it. 'This is the kind of food that would normally arouse my appetite,' said the donkey, 'but not when it is the result of the previous diner having had his throat cut!'

This fable taught me caution and I have avoided risky business ventures ever since—but you say 'those who grab wealth get to keep it', Just remember how many of them are eventually caught and killed! Clearly, the ones who have been punished constitute the larger crowd. A few people may profit from reckless behaviour, but many more are ruined by it.

FABLES ABOUT LIFE'S UPS AND DOWNS

Fable 415 (Babrius 76 = Perry 320)

The Soldier and His Horse

War was raging, so the cavalryman was able to feed his horse with barley and give him good hay to eat, treating the horse as his noble companion in battle. Then the war came to an end and a time of peace ensued. The soldier was no longer given wages by the state so his horse now had to work all the time carrying heavy logs down out of the woods into the city. In addition, his owner hired the horse out to other people to carry their loads as well. All the while, the

horse had as his food only the worst sort of chaff, and the harness he wore on his back was no longer that of a warhorse. Some time later, the clash of battle resounded once again around the city walls, and the trumpet summoned every man to dust off his shield, sharpen his sword, and ready his horse. The horse's owner put the bridle back on his steed, but when he led the horse out to be mounted, the horse collapsed and fell to his knees, having lost all his former strength. 'Go join the infantry!' the horse told his owner. 'You have transferred -me from the horse regiment to the donkeys; do you really think you can just change me back again?'

NOTE: The Greek proverb 'from horses to donkeys' (e.g. Apostolius 4.53) was commonly used to express a drastic reversal of fortune.

Fable 416 (Babrius 29 = Perry 318)

The Race-horse in the Mill

There was once a race-horse who had grown old and was sold to grind in the mill. Harnessed to the millstone, he ground grain all day long and into the evening. As he was working, the old horse groaned aloud and said, 'Once I ran in the races, but now I must run in circles around this millers' course!'

Do not boast too much at the height of your powers; people often spend their old age worn out with toil and trouble.

NOTE: 'The horse's old age' was proverbial in Greek (see Erasmus, *Adages* 2.1.32), suggesting the contrast between a youthful age of

strength and vigour which is diminished in old age.

Fable 417 (Aphthonius 13 = Perry 549)

The Horse and the Miller

A story about a horse, exhorting us to consider the human condition.

A horse was suffering from old age, so instead of serving in battle he was sent to the mill to turn the stones. Condemned to this daily grind and denied the glory of battle, the horse wept over his present way of life, remembering his past career. 'Woe is me!' the horse exclaimed. 'Listen, miller: when I was destined for the battlefield, I was decorated all over with armour and I had a man to serve me as my groom. As things are now, I don't know how it happened that I have only this mill to handle instead of a battle.' The miller said to the horse, 'Can't you keep quiet? I've had quite enough of your raving about the past: Luck can change people's lives for better or for worse!'

Fable 418 (Ademar 37 = Perry 565)

The Donkey and the Horse

A horse who was overly proud of his elegant trappings happened to run into a donkey. The donkey was worn out with work and slow to make way for the approaching horse. 'I am tempted to smash you to pieces with my hooves', said the horse. The donkey said nothing and only groaned, calling upon the gods to take note of his suffering. Not long afterwards, the horse, now a broken-down wreck from his

life on the race-track, was sent to work on a farm. When the donkey saw the horse carrying a load of manure, he laughed and said, ‘What has happened to you, who were once so proud of your elegant trappings? Time has reduced you to the wretchedness you formerly scorned!’

When prosperous folk are inclined to look down on others, they should hesitate, mindful of the fact that nobody knows what the future may bring.

Fable 419 (Chambry 23* = Perry 13)

The Fishermen and the Stone

Some fishermen were hauling in their net. It was quite heavy, so the fishermen made merry and danced for joy, thinking that they had landed a very big catch. Yet when they finally dragged it in, they found that the net contained only a few fish, together with a very large stone. The fishermen now grew extremely despondent, not so much because of the lack of fish but because they had been expecting just the opposite. Then one of the fishermen, an experienced old man, remarked, ‘Let’s not take it too hard, my friends! Given that grief seems to be the sister of joy, then we must expect to put up with some suffering precisely because we were so elated at first.’

The fable shows that we have to endure reversals of fortune, since we know that life is a matter of luck.

NOTE: For an Aesopic allegory about the joining of Pleasure and Pain, see Fable 532.

Fable 420 (Chambry 22* = Perry 21)

The Fishermen and the Tuna Fish

Some fishermen had gone out fishing, and when they had struggled for a long time but had not managed to catch anything, they became very downcast and prepared to turn back. All of a sudden a tuna fish who was being chased by some bigger fish leaped into their boat. The men seized the tuna fish and went home rejoicing.

The story shows that Luck often bestows the things that skill cannot obtain.

Fable 421 (Phaedrus 4.18 = Perry 78)

The Ship in a Storm

When a man was complaining about his bad luck, Aesop invented this story in order to console him: ‘As a ship was being tossed by the relentless waves and its passengers swayed between tears and the fear of death, the day suddenly took on a tranquil appearance and the ship surged ahead, borne by favourable winds. The sailors began to rejoice much too cheerfully, whereupon the ship’s pilot (a man made wise by the dangers he had faced) said to them, “It is better to restrain your good spirits while also not being too quick to despair: life is always a mixture of both grief and joy!”’,

FABLES ABOUT THE BITTER END

Fable 422 (Phaedrus 1.21 = Perry 481)

The Old Lion and the Donkey

When someone no longer commands the same respect he once did, his abject condition exposes him to the ridicule of even the most contemptible riffraff.

A lion, enfeebled by old age and having lost his former strength, was stretched out on the ground, about to take his last breath. A boar then approached him, foaming with rage. With his flashing tusks, the boar stabbed and wounded the lion, avenging a previous injury. Next came a bull, who likewise gored the lion's hated body with his deadly horns. When a donkey saw that the savage beast could be attacked with impunity, he struck the lion in the head with his hooves. Gasping his last breath, the lion exclaimed, 'I was loath to suffer the attacks of those brave creatures but when I am compelled to suffer you as well—you disgrace to the natural world! —I seem to die a second death.'

NOTE: Compare the proverb, 'to tug at the dead lion's beard' (e.g. Martial, *Epigrams* 10.90) or 'even a hare will bite a dead lion' (*Anthologia Planudea* 4).

Fable 423 (*Life of Aesop* 140 = Perry 381)

The Old Man and His Donkeys

There was a farmer who had grown old living in the countryside and who had never seen the city so he asked his children to let him see the city at least once before he died. His children yoked the donkeys to the wagon for him and said, ‘Just drive, and they will take you to the city.’ When they were halfway there, a storm blew up and the sky grew dark. The donkeys went astray and wandered to the edge of a cliff. When the old man saw the danger he was in, he said, ‘O Zeus, what crime have I committed against you that I must die this way? My killers are not even horses, but only these abominable donkeys!’

Fable 424 (Ignatius Diaconus, *Tetrasticha* 1.8 = Perry 354)

The Blacksmiths and the Mouse

A mouse was carrying away the corpse of another mouse who had died of starvation. The blacksmiths stood there and laughed when they saw this. The mouse who was still among the living addressed the blacksmiths through his plentiful tears, ‘Shame on you: you cannot even manage to sustain a single mouse!’

Do not laugh at the calamity that befalls your neighbour.

Fable 425 (Babrius 60 = Perry 167)

The Mouse in the Pot

A mouse fell into a pot of broth which had no lid. As he was choking on the grease and gasping for breath he said, ‘Well, I have

had my fill of eating and drinking and I have stuffed myself with all kinds of fine food: the time has now come for me to die!'

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: 'You members of the human race will become like that greedy mouse if you do not give up luxuries that are delicious but deadly.' Compare also the advice in Horace, *Epistles* 2.2.214: 'You've had your fill of gaming, likewise of eating and drinking: now it's time for you to go.'

Fable 426 (Syntipas 58 = Perry 86)

The Sparrow and the Myrtle Berries

A sparrow was feeding on some myrtle berries. The berries were so sweet that the sparrow stayed right there in the tree and refused to leave. Meanwhile, a bird-catcher who had been watching the sparrow caught her and killed her. As the sparrow was about to take her last breath, she exclaimed, 'What a miserable creature I am! I am going to die merely for the sake of some food and its momentary sweetness.'

This fable shows that some people, out of their desire for good food and luxury, put their lives at risk in the same way as wicked people do.

Fable 427 (Chambry 239* = Perry 80)

The Flies and the Honey

When the honey had been spilled in the pantry, some flies flew up and landed on it. Their feet got stuck and they could not fly away. As they were drowning in the honey, the flies remarked, ‘Oh, woe is us! For the sake of a brief banquet, we are going to die!’

The story shows that greediness often leads to serious trouble.

Fable 428 (Chambry 169* = Perry 251)

The Lark in the Snare

A lark fell into a snare and sang a lament, ‘Woe is me, wretched and unlucky bird that I am! I have brought about my own demise not for gold or silver or some object of value, but merely for a tiny bit of food.’

The story shows that people are willing to risk their lives for the sake of some petty profit.

Fable 429 (*Greek Anthology* 9.86 = Perry 454)

The Mouse and the Oyster

An omnivorous, gluttonous mouse was creeping through the house when he noticed an oyster with its mouth wide open, so he bit into the false flesh of the oyster’s wet beard. Suddenly the door to the oyster’s house slammed shut in a painful clasp. The mouse was enclosed in a prison with no hope of escape: he himself had closed the door to the tomb of his own suicide.

Fable 430 (Chambry 181 = Perry 253)

The Dog and the Shellfish

There was a certain dog who liked to swallow eggs. When he happened to come across a shellfish, he thought it was an egg. The dog opened his mouth, took a great big gulp, and swallowed the shellfish whole. When his stomach grew heavy and began to ache, the dog remarked, ‘Well, that’s what I get for thinking that anything round must be an egg!’

The story teaches us that there are unexpected consequences in store for people who attempt to do something that is beyond their comprehension.

Fable 431 (Syntipas 8 = Perry 201)

The Pigeon and the Painting

A pigeon had grown very thirsty, so she flew from place to place looking for some water to drink. She saw a water jar painted on a wall and thought that it was actually full of water, so she flew right into the wall in order to take a drink. As the pigeon collided with the wall, she brought her life abruptly to an end. As she drew her last breath, the pigeon said to herself, ‘What a wretched and unlucky creature I am! I didn’t even suspect that looking for something to drink could bring about my own demise.’

The fable shows that caution is far superior to reckless haste and hurry.

NOTE: L’Estrange uses an English proverb as his epimythium: ‘Rash Men do many Things in Haste that they repent of at Leisure.’

FABLES ABOUT FOOLISH PLANS

Fable 432 (Chambry 89* = Perry 55)

The Maids and the Rooster

A hard-working widow woman had some maidservants whom she would rouse up for work at the sound of the cockcrow when it was still dark outside. The maids were burdened with endless tasks, so they decided it would be a good idea to kill the household rooster since it was the rooster who made their mistress get them up while it was still dark. Yet after they had killed the rooster, their desperate situation grew even worse: now that the mistress was no longer able to tell the hour by the rooster, she woke the maids up even earlier than before.

The fable shows that people often make plans that turn out to be to their own disadvantage.

Fable 433 (Syntipas 42 = Perry 58)

The Widow and Her Hen

There was a widow who had a hen that laid one egg each and every day. The woman then began to feed the hen more lavishly, thinking that if the hen ate more grain she would lay two eggs. The hen got so fat from eating all the food that she stopped laying eggs entirely.

The fable shows that people who grasp at more than they need lose the little that they held in their hands.

Fable 434 (Syntipas 27 = Perry 87)

The Man and the Golden Eggs

A man had a hen that laid a golden egg for him each and every day. The man was not satisfied with this daily profit, and instead he foolishly grasped for more. Expecting to find a treasure inside, the man slaughtered the hen. When he found that the hen did not have a treasure inside her after all, he remarked to himself, 'While chasing after hopes of a treasure, I lost the profit I held in my hands!'

The fable shows that people often grasp for more than they need and thus lose the little they have.

NOTE: In other versions of this fable (e.g. Avianus 33), the bird is a goose. In the Buddhist *Suvannahamsa-jataka*, a bird with golden feathers is plucked bare by its owner.

Fable 435 (Odo 21 = Perry 594)

The Man and the Cat

Against bishops who rely heavily on their subordinates.

There was a certain man who had some cheese in his pantry. Then a mouse came and began to gnaw at the cheese. The man did not know what to do. Finally he put a cat in the pantry but the cat ate both the mouse and the cheese.

NOTE: For a similar situation involving a weasel, see Fable 378.

Fable 436 (Phaedrus 1.6 = Perry 314)

The Frogs and the Sun

When Aesop saw crowds of people thronging to the wedding party of his neighbour, a thief, he immediately told them the following story: ‘Once upon a time, the Sun wanted to get married but the frogs raised a cry of protest up to the heavens. Jupiter, disturbed by their shouting, asked the reason for their complaint, and one of the swamp’s inhabitants explained, “Already one Sun is enough to burn up all the ponds, condemning us to a miserable death in our parched abode. What is going to happen to us when he will have sons of his own?”’

> NOTE: In this case, English offers a fortuitous pun—sun/son—that is not possible in Latin or Greek.

Fable 437 (Aphthonius 38 = Perry 283)

The Farmer and the Fox

A wicked farmer envied his neighbour’s abundant crops. In order to destroy the fruits of that man’s labour, he caught a fox, attached a blazing firebrand to her tail, and then let the fox loose in his neighbour’s crops. The fox, however, did not go where she was sent. Instead, as fate decreed, she set fire to the crops of the man who had let her loose.

Bad neighbours are the first to suffer from the harm they would do to others.

Fable 438 (Chambry 197 = Perry 144)

The Lion and the Farmer

A lion entered a farmer's yard and the farmer, wanting to capture the lion, shut the outer gate. The lion, unable to get out, first devoured all the sheep and then turned his attention to the cattle. The farmer became afraid for his own safety so he opened the door. After the lion had gone away, the farmer's wife saw the farmer groaning and said to him, 'It serves you right! Why did you want to shut yourself up with the sort of creature you should run away from even at a distance?'

In the same way people who provoke those stronger than themselves must naturally suffer the consequences of their mistake.

Fable 439 (Babrius 45 = Perry 6)

The Goatherd and the Wild Goats

Snow was falling from the sky. Seeking shelter from the storm, a goatherd drove his goats, all covered with white from the thickly falling snow, into a cave. He had thought the cave was empty, but he soon discovered that there were some wild horned goats who had already taken shelter there. The wild goats were far more numerous than his own goats and they were also bigger and stronger. The goatherd therefore tossed the fodder he had brought from the woods to the wild goats, while he let his own goats go hungry. When the weather cleared, he found that his own goats had died, while the wild goats had already gone away and were tramping their way

through the untrodden thickets upon the mountains where animals had not yet grazed. The ridiculous goatherd went back home without any goats at all: hoping for a larger flock he did not even profit from the goats that were his to begin with.

Fable 440 (Babrius 143 = Perry 176)

The Farmer and the Frozen Viper

A farmer picked up a viper that was half-dead from the cold. When the farmer had warmed the viper, the viper uncoiled and grabbed hold of the man's hand and, with a fatal bite, he killed the man who had wanted to save him. As he was dying, the man spoke some words that are well worth remembering: 'Well, I got what I deserve for having shown kindness to a scoundrel!'

NOTE: The farmer's self-rebuke is typical of the Aesopic fable tradition: the point of the story is not the viper's wicked decision to bite the man, but the man's own foolish decision to have picked up the viper in the first place. Compare the Roman proverb, 'you're nurturing a snake in your bosom' (Petronius, *Satyricon* 77).

FABLES ABOUT FOOLISH ANIMALS AND GOOD ADVICE

Fable 441 (Syntipas 57 = Perry 192)

The Hen and the Eggs

A hen came across the eggs of a snake and devoted herself to them, settling atop the eggs and brooding on them. A swallow saw what the hen was doing and said, ‘O you stupid, senseless creature! They will destroy you first of all and then destroy everyone around you!’

The fable shows that we should never put our trust in a wicked man, even if he seems to be completely innocuous.

NOTE: L’Estrange has a vivid epimythium: ‘’Tis the hard Fortune of many a Good Natur’d Man to breed up a Bird to Pick out his own Eyes, in despite of all Cautions to the contrary.’

Fable 442 (Syntipas 61 = Perry 135)

The Wolves and the Hides

Some wolves saw some cowhides in the river. They wanted to take the hides, but the depth of the river in flood prevented them from doing so. The wolves therefore decided to drink up all the water so that they could then reach the hides. A man said to the wolves, ‘If you try to drink up all that water, you will immediately burst into pieces and die on the spot!’

The fable indicts people who recklessly embark on some senseless project.

NOTE: In other versions of this story (Phaedrus 1.20 and Plutarch, *Common Conceptions Against the Stoics* 19), the protagonists are foolish dogs, not wolves, who do in fact drink from the river until they burst.

Fable 443 (Horace, *Epistles* 1.7.29 ff. = Perry 24)

The Fox and the Weasel

It happened that a slender fox had made her way through a narrow crack into a coffer of grain. After eating her fill, she wanted to get back out again but her swollen body prevented her from doing so. At a safe distance the weasel said to her, 'If you want to get out of there, you'd better be as thin when you go back through that narrow crack as you were when you went in!'

Fable 444 (Syntipas 10 = Perry 408)

The Fox and the Hare in the Well

A thirsty hare had gone down into a well to drink the water. He took a good long drink, and when he wanted to get back out again, he found himself trapped with no means of escape. It was a very discouraging situation. A fox then arrived on the scene, and when she found the hare she said to him, 'You have made a very serious mistake indeed: you should have first decided on a way to get out and only then gone down into the well!'

This fable indicts people who act impulsively, without thinking things through.

> NOTE: For a story in which the fox gets herself trapped in a well, see Fable 113.

Fable 445 (Chambry 68* = Perry 43)

The Two Frogs at the Well

There were two frogs whose pond had dried up, so they went looking for a new place to live. When they came to a well, one of them thought that they should jump in immediately, but the other one said, ‘Wait: what if the water were to dry up here too; how would we be able to get back out again?’

The story teaches us not to approach a situation without thinking about it carefully first.

> NOTE: L’Estrange applies a well-known English proverb in his epimythium: ‘’Tis good Advice to look before we leap.’

Fable 446 (Babrius 21 = Perry 290)

The Oxen and the Butcher

There were once some oxen who had decided to destroy all the butchers, since their very profession was hostile to oxen. They banded together and sharpened their horns in preparation for the coming battle. Among them was a very elderly ox who had ploughed a great deal of earth in his day. This ox said to the others, ‘The butchers slaughter us with experienced hands and they kill us without unnecessary torment, but if we fall into the hands of men who lack this skill, then we will die twice over—and there will always be someone to slaughter us, even if we get rid of the butchers!’

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: ‘Someone who is eager to flee a present danger should take care or else he will find himself in even worse straits.’

Fable 447 (Hermogencs, *Progymnasmata* 1 = Perry 464)

The Monkeys and the City

The monkeys came together in an assembly to decide whether or not to found a city. When the monkeys concluded that it would be a good thing to do, they were about to begin the work. At that point an old monkey restrained them, saying that they would be captured more easily by enclosing themselves inside a city’s walls.

Fable 448 (Odo 47)

The Monkey and the Nut

A fable for people who are unwilling to suffer adversity.

The monkey gladly eats nuts because the nutmeats are tasty, but when she tastes the bitterness of the shell she throws the nut away and loses the nutmeat inside.

FABLES ABOUT ANIMAL WISDOM

Fable 449 (Chambry 327* = Perry 224)

The Fox, the Boar, and His Tusks

The wild boar was standing beside a tree, sharpening his tusks. The fox asked him why he was sharpening his tusks now, when there

was no immediate need for him to do so. The wild boar replied, ‘I have my reasons! This way, when danger threatens, I won’t have to take time to whet my tusks but will instead have them ready for use.’

The fable shows that we need to prepare ourselves before danger strikes.

Fable 450 (Phaedrus *App*. 22 = Perry 550)

The Bear and the Crabs

Whenever the bear cannot find food in the woods, he runs down to the rocky shore and, grabbing hold of a rock, he gradually lowers his hairy legs into the water. As soon as some crabs have caught hold of his fur, he leaps up onto dry land and shakes off these spoils from the sea. The bear then feasts on the food he has cleverly collected all over his legs.

This shows how hunger can sharpen even the most dull-witted creatures.

Fable 451 (Phaedrus *App*. 30 = Perry 118)

The Beaver and His Testicles

There is an animal whose name in English is ‘beaver’ (although those garrulous Greeks—so proud of their endless supply of words! —call him *castor*, which is also the name of a god). It is said that when the beaver is being chased by dogs and realizes that he cannot outrun them, he bites off his testicles, since he knows that this is what he is hunted for. I suppose there is some kind of superhuman understanding that prompts the beaver to act this way, for as soon

as the hunter lays his hands on that magical medicine, he abandons the chase and calls off his dogs.

If only people would take the same approach and agree to be deprived of their possessions in order to live lives free from danger; no one, after all, would set a trap for someone already stripped to the skin.

NOTE: This strange legend of the beaver's self-castration is attested in the Greek and Roman natural-history writers (e.g. Aelian, *Characteristics of Animals* 6.34 and Pliny, *Natural History* 8.109). For a fable about the god Castor referred to here, see Fable 166.

Fable 452 (Phaedrus *App*. 25 = Perry 552)

The Lizard and the Snake

A lizard happened to be looking the other way when a snake grabbed her from behind. The snake then opened his gaping maw to swallow the lizard, but the lizard grabbed a little twig that was lying nearby and blocked the snake's greedy mouth with this clever obstacle, holding the twig turned firmly sideways between her teeth. The snake thus failed to capture his quarry and the lizard got away.

NOTE: There is a promythium appended to the fable in Perotti's Appendix: 'Where the skin of the lion doesn't fit, one must wear the fox's habit; in other words, where force is not enough, cleverness must be used instead.' This saying was proverbial in Greek (e.g. Plutarch, *Life of Lysander* 7).

Fable 453 (Avianus 27 = Perry 390)

The Crow and the Water Jar

A thirsty crow noticed a huge jar and saw that at the very bottom there was a little bit of water. For a long time the crow tried to spill the water out so that it would run over the ground and allow her to satisfy her tremendous thirst. After exerting herself for some time in vain, the crow grew frustrated and applied all her cunning with unexpected ingenuity: as she tossed little stones into the jar, the water rose of its own accord until she was able to take a drink.

This fable shows us that thoughtfulness is superior to brute strength, since this is the way that the crow was able to carry her task to its conclusion.

NOTE: This story is found in several compendia of ancient natural history writers (e.g. Aelian, *Characteristics of Animals* 2.48).

FABLES ABOUT UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

Fable 454 (Syntipas 7 = Perry 281)

The Two Roosters and the Eagle

Two roosters were fighting with one another. The loser hid himself away in a corner, while the rooster who had won the battle flew up on top of the house and flapped his wings, crowing about his victory. An eagle then swooped down and carried the rooster away.

This fable shows that you should not boast foolishly or become conceited if you happen to enjoy a moment of success.

Fable 455 (Syntipas 51 = Perry 165)

The Mice and the Weasels

War had broken out between the mice and the weasels. The mice were inferior in strength, and when they realized that their utter weakness and cowardice put them at a disadvantage, they elected satraps and generals who could be their leaders in war. The satraps wanted to be more remarkable and conspicuous than the other mice, so they put horns on the tops of their heads. Then the weasels attacked the mice once again and routed them completely. The other mice were able to scamper quickly and easily into the mouse holes which had been prepared for their concealment. The commanders, however, despite being the first to reach the holes in the retreat, were unable to get inside because of the horns on their heads. The weasels were thus able to seize the mouse generals and consign them to death.

This fable shows that generals who offer encouragement to their soldiers without seeking divine assistance for the coming battle can provoke a disaster.

NOTE: This must have been a popular fable, as the version in Phaedrus 4.6 remarks that the story was often 'painted in pubs'. For a similar story about the hare who wanted stag's horns, see Fable 511.

Fable 456 (Chambry 28 = Perry 25)

The Halcyon and the Sea

The halcyon is a bird who is fond of deserted places and who always lives on the sea. They say that she makes her nest on the rocky cliffs of the coast in order to protect herself from human hunters. So when a certain halcyon was about to lay her eggs, she went to a promontory and found a rock jutting out towards the sea and decided to make her nest there. But when she went to look for food, it happened that the sea swelled under the blustering wind and reached as high as the halcyon's home and flooded the nest, killing her chicks. When the halcyon returned and saw what had happened, she said, 'What a fool I was to have protected myself against a plot hatched on the land by taking refuge here on the sea, when it is the sea that has utterly betrayed me!'

There are people who do the same thing: while defending themselves against their enemies, they unwittingly fall prey to friends who turn out to be for more dangerous.

Fable 457 (Chambry 105* = Perry 75)

The Hunters and the Deer With One Eye

There was a deer who had lost an eye, so she lived on the shore, keeping her good eye towards the land, looking for hunters. Meanwhile, she turned her blind eye towards the sea, since she did not expect any danger from that direction. Then some men came sailing by, took aim, and shot the deer. The deer bewailed her fate, since she had been afraid of something that didn't affect her at all,

while she was undone by something she didn't even think was dangerous.

The fable shows that the things we think are harmful turn out to be helpful, and the things we think are helpful turn out harmful.

Fable 458 (Plutarch, *Advice on Marriage* 41.144a = Perry 440)

The Runaway Slave in the Mill

A man finally caught sight of his runaway slave and started chasing him. The slave ran straight into the mill and his master said, 'Where better could I have hoped to have found you!'

> NOTE: Slaves were regularly punished by being sent to turn the millstones together with the draught animals (compare Plautus, *Persa* 22, when one of the slaves is boasting about his punishment: 'I've moved up the chain, so to speak, of command: they've made me chief whipping-boy at the mill!').

Fable 459 (Chambry 104* = Perry 76)

The Deer and the Lion

A deer was running away from some hunters and found herself at a cave which was the home of a lion. The deer went inside, thinking that she could hide there, but the lion attacked her. As she was being mauled to death by the lion, the deer said to herself, 'What a fool I was! By running away from the men, I handed my self over to this wild beast!'

The same is true of human beings: fearing a lesser danger, they throw themselves into even worse disaster.

Fable 460 (Chambry 167 = Perry 128)

The Raven and the Snake

A raven who was looking for food noticed a snake stretched out asleep in the sun. The raven jumped on the snake and grabbed it, but the snake then twisted back around and bit him. As he was dying, the raven said, 'What a fool I was! The windfall I found has turned out to be fatal!'

This fable can be applied to a man who finds a treasure that puts his life in jeopardy.

> NOTE: For a very similar fable but with a different moral interpretation, see Fable 143.

Fable 461 (Babrius 61 = Perry 327)

The Hunter and the Fisherman

A hunter was coming down from the mountain after the hunt while a fisherman was walking along with a basket full of fish, and the two men crossed paths. The hunter preferred to have fish fresh from the sea, while the fisherman preferred wild game caught in the fields, so they exchanged the things that they were carrying. From then on they always traded their catch so that they could both enjoy more appetizing dinners. Eventually someone gave them this advice:

‘Be careful, because too much familiarity will eventually spoil the goodness of these things, so that each of you will long to have what was originally yours.’

Fable 462 (Phaedrus *App*. 4 = Perry 534)

Mercury and the Two Women

Mercury was once the guest of two women who treated him in a cheap and tawdry manner. One of these women was the mother of an infant still in his cradle, while the other woman was a prostitute. In order to return the women’s hospitality as they deserved, Mercury paused on the threshold of their door as he was leaving and said, ‘You are gazing upon a god: I am prepared to give you right now whatever it is you want.’ The mother beseeched the god to allow her to see her son with a beard as soon as possible, while the prostitute wanted the power to attract anything she touched. Mercury flew away and the women went back inside, where they found the baby with a beard, wailing and screaming. This made the prostitute laugh so hard that her nose filled with snot (as sometimes happens), but when she touched her hand to her nose, the nose followed her hand until it reached all the way down to the floor. In this way the woman who had laughed at someone else ended up being laughed at herself.

NOTE: There is a promythium appended to the fable in Perotti’s Appendix: ‘Do not ask for more than you deserve.’

Fable 463 (Chambry 85* = Perry 299)

The Man and the Tree Without Fruit

A farmer had a tree on his land that did not yield any sort of fruit whatsoever. Instead, it was a home to the sparrows and the cicadas who chirped and sang. The farmer, however, thought that the tree was useless and decided he would cut it down. He grabbed an axe and prepared to start chopping, but the cicadas and the sparrows all began to wail, shouting these words at the man, 'Listen to us, O master of the tree: we implore you to be more generous. Please do not cut down this reverend dwelling! If indeed you are resolved to do such a thing, what benefit can you possibly hope for?' The man felt no pity for the creatures and showed them no mercy as he struck the tree three times with the axe's blade. But no sooner had the man made a crack in the tree when he found there a hive of bees and honey. He took a taste and immediately dropped his axe, vowing to cherish this tree even more than his fruit-bearing trees.

Fable 464 (Babrius 119 = Perry 285)

The Statue of Hermes and the Treasure

There was a craftsman who had a wooden statue of Hermes. Every day he poured libations and made sacrifices to it, but he still wasn't able to earn a living. The man got angry at the god, so he grabbed the statue by the leg and threw it down on the ground. The head of the statue shattered and gold coins came pouring out from inside it. As he gathered the gold, the man remarked, 'Hermes, you are an

unlucky god, since you take no thought for your friends. You didn't do me any good when I was treating you with devotion, but now that I have wronged you, you give me this immense reward. I do not understand this strange kind of cult!'

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: 'Aesop even involves the gods in his stories, urging us to chastise one another: if you honour a wicked man, you will have nothing to show for it, but by shaming him you will make a profit.' Hermes was the god of craftsmen and merchants; for another fable about Hermes as a god who bestows wealth, see Fable 561.

Fable 465 (Syntipas 48 = Perry 405)

The Cyclops and His Treasure

There was a man who was prudent in his prosperity, although he was somewhat too proud of himself. He enjoyed a comfortable life, together with his children, but after a while he lost all his money. Suffering from spiritual distress (which is only natural in such circumstances), the man uttered blasphemies and even felt compelled to commit suicide, because he would rather die than live in such wretched circumstances. Accordingly, he took his sword and set out to find a deserted place. On his way, he came across a deep pit in which he found some gold—and a great sum of gold it was! The gold had been left there by a Cyclops, which is a kind of giant. When this god-fearing man noticed the gold, he was overwhelmed at first by both terror and delight. He then cast aside his sword, took

up the gold, and went back home to his children, filled with joy. Later, the Cyclops came back to the pit. When he did not find his gold there, but saw instead a sword lying in its place, he immediately picked up the sword and killed himself.

The story shows that bad things naturally happen to bad people, while good things lie in wait for people who are honest and reasonable.

NOTE: In classical Greek mythology, a Cyclops is an anti-social giant who lives in caves; this story's representation of a Cyclops guarding buried treasure appears to be unprecedented, although it may be connected with legends about their building walls and fortifications, as well as their associations with the underworld (e.g. Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.630).

FABLES ABOUT FATE AND FORTUNE

Fable 466 (Babrius 136 = Perry 363)

The Father, the Son, and the Lion

There was a timid old man who had an only child, a son, who was generally high-spirited and who wanted to go hunting. In a dream the father saw his son lying dead, killed by a lion. Afraid that this might really happen and that the dream might actually come true, he built a house for the men of the family, and it was an extremely beautiful house, with high ceilings and sturdy walls and full of sunlight. He then enclosed his son inside this house, locked away under guard. To keep his son from becoming sad, he had the walls

decorated with pictures of various animals, and among all these animals there was a painted lion. Staring at the lion, the boy felt even more sad, and he eventually approached the lion and said, 'O you wicked animal, because you showed that lying dream to my father's eyes you are able to keep me prisoner here, watched by guards as if I were a woman. But why do I attack you only with words, and not with an act of violence as well?' The boy then dashed his hands against the lion, intending to scratch its eyes out, but instead a sliver of wood came off and stabbed him under his fingernail. This soon brought about a burning inflammation of the flesh, and although the desperate father did everything he could, it was all to no avail. The infection spread until it reached the boy's groin, and thus brought his life to an end. The old man was unable to save his child, who had been destined to die because of a lion who was not even alive.

You must bravely endure the things that are prepared for you, not trying to outwit what lies ahead. You will not be able to escape that which must be.

NOTE: For a fable which explains the difference between true and false dreams, see Fable 529.

Fable 467 (Chambry 294 = Perry 162)

The Mother, the Child, and the Crow

The mother of a small baby consulted a soothsayer who told her that her child would be killed by a crow. Terrified, the mother ordered that a large chest be built and she shut her baby inside, protecting him so that no crow could harm him. She continued in this way, opening the chest at regular intervals in order to give the baby the food that he needed. Then one day, after she had opened the chest and was using an iron bar to prop up the lid, the child recklessly stuck his head out. At that moment, the iron bar—it was a crow bar—fell down on top of the boy's head and killed him.

NOTE: In the Greek the 'crow' (or, rather, *korax*, the 'raven') appears to have been an actual part of the chest, presumably a bar of black metal with a bend at one end, shaped like an English 'crowbar'.

Fable 468 (Phaedrus *App*. 16 = Perry 544)

The Bride and the Two Grooms

There were two young men who both wanted to marry the same girl. The well-off young man won the prize, since the poor man had nothing more to offer than his good name and good looks. When the appointed wedding day arrived, the grief-stricken lover was unable to endure the heartbreak and hid himself away in his country home just outside the city. This poor man's home happened to be located quite near the rich man's opulent manor, the future home of that young bride who was now about to leave her mother's care forever (the groom's house in the city had not seemed sufficiently large for

the occasion). The wedding procession unfolded, with a large crowd of guests in attendance and Hymen, the god of marriage, leading the way, the wedding torch in his hand. There was also a donkey standing at the threshold of the gate, who was regularly put out for hire by the poor man, his owner, and it just so happened that the family of the bride had decided to hire this very donkey so that the bride would not bruise her feet on the rough road. At this moment, Venus, the goddess of love, showed her compassion: the clouds in the sky were tossed by the winds and a crack of thunder shook the heavens. As grim night descended with a dense downpour of rain, the light was snatched from everyone's eyes and the terrified party guests were pelted with hail as they scattered in all directions. While everyone ran in search of shelter from the storm, the donkey scampered under the familiar roof that he found nearby, and announced his arrival with a loud 'hee-haw'. The household slaves came running up and were amazed to see a beautiful young woman in the wagon. They then went to inform their master, who was reclining with a few of his friends at the table, trying to cheer his broken heart with one cup of wine after another. When the man heard what had happened, he rejoiced at this unexpected pleasure. Incited now by both Bacchus and Venus, the man joyfully completed the wedding ceremony, applauded by his companions. Meanwhile, the family of the bride sent the town crier to look for her, while the erstwhile groom lamented his runaway bride. When the turn of events became known to the general public, they all praised the good will of the gods.

NOTE: There is a promythium appended to the fable in Perotti's Appendix: 'The fable shows that fortune can occasionally bestow favours that exceed a person's hopes and expectations.' Bacchus was the Roman equivalent of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine.

Fable 469 (Avianus 12 = Perry 61)

The Farmer and the Goddess Fortune

A farmer had started turning the earth with his plough when he saw a treasure suddenly spring into view from the depths of the furrow. His spirit soared as he abandoned the lowly plough and drove his oxen off to better pastures. He immediately built an altar to the earth goddess Tellus, worshipping her for having happily bestowed on him the wealth that had been buried inside her. While the farmer was rejoicing in his new circumstances, the goddess Fortuna was indignant that he had not considered her equally worthy of incense and offerings. She thus appeared to the man and gave him this warning about the future: 'Instead of making an offering of your new-found wealth in my temple, you are sharing it with all the other gods. Yet when your gold is stolen and you are stricken with grief, then you will turn to me first of all in your despair and deprivation!'

NOTE: Fortuna is the Roman goddess of luck. Tellus, a Latin word for 'earth', is equivalent to the Greek goddess Ge or Gaia.

Fable 470 (Babrius 49 = Perry 174)

The Goddess Fortune and the Man by the Well

A workman had thoughtlessly fallen asleep one night next to a well. While he slept, he seemed to hear the voice of Tyche, the goddess of fortune, as she stood there beside him. 'Hey you,' the goddess said, 'you'd better wake up! I am afraid that if you fall into the well, I will be the one that people blame, giving me a bad reputation. In general, people blame me for everything that happens to them, including the unfortunate events and tumbles for which a person really has only himself to blame.'

NOTE: The name of the Greek goddess 'Tyche' means 'luck' or 'fortune'.

Fable 471 (Chambry 131 = Perry 110)

The Man and the Hero

A man kept a hero shrine in his house and made expensive sacrifices to it. Since he was constantly paying out money and spending great sums on the offerings, the god came to him one night and said: 'Look here, stop squandering your wealth: if you spend everything and become poor, you'll put the blame on me!'

Likewise, when people suffer misfortune because of their own foolishness, they often blame the gods.

NOTE: The spirits of dead heroes were the object of devotional cult in ancient Greece (in *The Republic* 427b, Plato divides divine

worship into three categories: gods, daemons, and heroes, in that order).

FABLES ABOUT GODS AND MORTALS

Fable 472 (Chambry 50* = Perry 36)

The Man and the Oracle

A wicked man had gone to visit Apollo in Delphi, wanting to test the god. He took a sparrow in one hand, concealing it with his cloak, and then stood by the oracle and inquired of the god, 'Apollo, the thing that I am carrying in my hand: is it living, or is it dead?' The man planned to show the sparrow alive if the god said 'dead', and if the god said 'living', he would strangle the sparrow immediately and present the dead bird. But the god recognized the man's evil purpose, and said, 'Listen, do whatever you want: it is entirely up to you whether you will show me something living or dead!'

The fable shows that the divine gods cannot be tricked or deceived.

NOTE: Delphi was the site of Apollo's main oracle in Greece.

Fable 473 (Babrius 2 = Perry 295)

The Farmer and His Mattock

A farmer had lost his mattock while digging in the vineyard. He checked to see if any of the bystanders had taken it, but each of them denied it. Not knowing what to do, he brought everyone to the city, intending to make them swear a solemn oath (country folk

being convinced that only simple-minded gods live in the countryside, unlike the real gods who live inside the city walls, observing everything that happens). They entered through the city gates and put down their packs in order to wash their feet at a well. Then they heard a herald shouting that a thousand drachmas was being offered as a reward for information about property which had been stolen from the god. When the farmer heard this, he said, 'I have come on a fool's errand! How can this god know anything about other thieves, when he can't even find the crooks who stole his own stuff. A god—but he has to offer a reward to find out if any human being knows what happened!'

Fable 474 (Chambry 253* = Perry 173)

The Man, Hermes, and the Axes

A man was chopping wood by a certain river when he dropped his axe and it was carried away by the current. The man then sat down on the riverbank and began to weep. The god Hermes finally took pity on the man and appeared before him. When Hermes learned the reason for his sorrow, he brought up a golden axe and asked whether that was the man's axe. The man said that it was not his. A second time, Hermes brought up a silver axe, and again asked the man if this was the axe he had lost but the man said that it was not. The third time Hermes brought up the axe that the man had lost and when the man recognized his axe, Hermes rewarded the man's honesty by giving all of the axes to him as a gift. The man took the

axes and went to tell his friends what had happened. One of the men was jealous and wanted to do the same thing, so he took his axe and went to the river. He began chopping some wood and then intentionally let his axe fall into the whirling waters. As he was weeping, Hermes appeared and asked him what had happened, and the man said that he had lost his axe. When Hermes brought up the golden axe and asked the man if that was the axe he had lost, the greedy man got excited and said that it was the one. Not only did the man fail to receive any gifts from the god, he didn't even retrieve his own axe.

The fable shows that the gods are sympathetic to honest people and hostile to people who are liars.

Fable 475 (Chambry 110* = Perry 89)

Hermes and Tiresias

Hermes wanted to test Tiresias' prophetic power, so the god stole some of his cattle from the pasture. He then assumed human form and went to the city in order to pay Tiresias a visit. When Tiresias was told about the loss of his cattle, he took Hermes with him and they went out together to seek an auspice regarding the theft. Tiresias asked Hermes to tell him about any sign from the birds that he happened to see. The first sign Hermes saw was an eagle flying from the left to the right, and he reported this to Tiresias. Tiresias said that this didn't have anything to do with the cattle. Next, Hermes saw a crow sitting on a tree who first looked up and then

looked down towards the ground. Hermes reported this observation to the soothsayer and at this point Tiresias declared, ‘Yes, that crow is swearing by both Heaven and Earth that I could get my cattle back … if you were willing to co-operate!’

This fable can be used for a man who is a thief.

NOTE: Tiresias was a legendary prophet who was able to interpret the signs of the gods, such as the flight of birds and other natural portents, but because he was blind, his interpretation of the signs depended on hearing reports from sighted persons, as in this fable.

Fable 476 (Chambry 260* = Perry 178)

The Traveller and Hermes

A traveller who needed to make a long journey vowed that if he found anything, he would give half of it to Hermes. When he came across a bag full of dates and almonds he grabbed the bag and ate the almonds and dates. He then placed the pits of the dates and the shells of the almonds upon an altar and said, ‘You have what was promised you, O Hermes: I have saved the outsides and the insides for you!’

The fable can be used for a money-grubbing man who is so greedy that he even tries to trick the gods.

Fable 477 (Chambry 55 = Perry 28)

The Sick Man and the Gods

A poor man had fallen sick, so he prayed to the gods and vowed, ‘If I recover my health, I will sacrifice a hundred oxen in your honour.’ The gods wanted to test whether the man was telling the truth, so they granted his prayer and the man recovered from his sickness. When the man was well again, he did not have any oxen that he could sacrifice, so he made a hundred oxen out of dough and burned them on the altar, saying, ‘O supernatural beings, behold, I have fulfilled my vow.’ The gods wanted to pay him back for having tricked them, so they stood at the head of his bed in a dream and said, ‘Go to the beach, in such-and-such a place, and you will find there a hundred talents of gold.’ The man woke up, filled with joy, and went running down to the designated place to look for the gold. When he got there, he fell into the hands of pirates and was taken captive. The man pleaded with the pirates and said, ‘Just let me go and I will give you a thousand talents of gold!’

The story shows that the gods hate liars.

> NOTE: In another version of this fable, the man is sold by the pirates for the same amount of money promised to the man by the gods. These oxen made out of dough resemble the proverbial ‘Locrian bull’, a sacrificial bull which the Locrians made out of wood and offered in place of a real one (Erasmus, *Adages* 2.8.62).

Fable 478 (Chambry 46* = Perry 34)

The Sick Man and His Wife

A poor man had taken ill and was in very bad shape. When the doctors had given up hope, since he didn't have anything he could pay with, the man called upon the gods and vowed, 'O you great and radiant divinities, if you restore my health, I will bring a hundred oxen to you as a sacrifice.' His wife then asked him, 'Where are you going to get a hundred oxen from, if you get well?' The man said to her, 'And do you suppose I am going to ever get out of this bed so that the gods will be able to demand payment?'

The story shows that people are often quick to make promises, but they do not really expect to have to fulfill them.

Fable 479 (Chambry 166* = Perry 323)

The Raven and Hermes

A raven who had been caught in a snare prayed to Apollo, promising that he would make an offering of frankincense if Apollo would rescue him from the snare. The raven escaped, but he forgot about his vow. Later on he was caught in another snare, but he ignored Apollo this time and instead vowed a sacrifice to Hermes. Hermes then said to the bird, 'You wretched creature! How can I trust you, when you betrayed your former master?'

FABLES ABOUT GODS AND FOOLS

Fable 480 (Chambry 53 = Perry 30)

The Shipwrecked Man and Athena

A wealthy Athenian was making a sea voyage with some companions. A terrible storm blew up and the ship capsized. All the other passengers started to swim, but the Athenian kept praying to Athena, making all kinds of promises if only she would save him. Then one of the other shipwrecked passengers swam past him and said, ‘While you pray to Athena, start moving your arms!’

So too we should think of ourselves and do something on our own in addition to praying to the gods. The fable shows that it is better to gain the favour of the gods by our own efforts than to fail to take care of ourselves and be rescued by supernatural powrs. When disaster comes upon us, we should make every possible effort on our own behalf and only then ask for divine assistance.

Fable 481 (Babrius 20 = Perry 291)

Heracles and the Driver

An ox-driver was bringing his wagon from town and it fell into a steep ditch. The man should have pitched in and helped, but instead he stood there and did nothing, praying to Heracles, who was the only one of the gods whom he really honoured and revered. The god appeared to the man and said, ‘Grab hold of the wheels and goad the oxen: pray to the gods only when you’re making some effort on your own behalf; otherwise, your prayers are wasted!’

Fable 482 (Chambry 356* = Perry 231)

The Man, the Flea, and Heracles

A flea once jumped up onto a man's foot and sat there. The man called upon Heracles to aid him in his struggle. When the flea finally jumped off, the man groaned and said, 'O Heracles, if you refused to help me to defeat this flea, how will you exert yourself on my behalf against more powerful enemies?'

The story shows that we should not call upon the gods in trivial affairs but only in dire necessity.

NOTE: This motif was proverbial: 'calling on the gods because of the bite of a flea' (see Erasmus, *Adages* 3.4.4). In other versions of this story (included in Chambry's first edition of the Greek fables), the man is said to be an athlete who expects Heracles to help him defeat his competitors.

Fable 483 (Babrius 10 = Perry 301)

Aphrodite and the Slave-woman

A man was in love with an ugly, wicked slave-woman from his own household and was quick to give her whatever she asked for. This slave-woman, bedecked with gold and trailing a delicate purple robe around her legs, would pick fights with the master's wife at every opportunity. It was Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, whom she regarded as the cause of her good fortune, so she lit lamps in the goddess's honour, sacrificing, praying, begging, and beseeching her every single day. Finally the goddess came to the couple as they were sleeping. She appeared to the slave-woman in a

dream and said, ‘Do not give thanks to me; I certainly did not make you beautiful! Indeed, I am furious that this man would even think you were worth looking at.’

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: ‘Only a man who is out of his mind and hated by the gods delights in ugly things as if they were beautiful.’

Fable 484 (Syntipas 2 = Perry 60)

The Poor Man and Death

A poor man was carrying a load of wood on his shoulders. After a while he was feeling faint, so he sat down by the side of the road. Putting aside his burden, he bitterly called out to Death, summoning Death with the words ‘O him!’ Death immediately showed up and said to the man, ‘Why have you summoned me?’ The man said, ‘Oh, just to have you help me pick this burden up off the ground!’

The fable shows that everyone clings to life, even if they suffer from affliction and oppression.

NOTE: In other versions of this fable (Chambry 78), the protagonist is an ‘old man’, rather than a ‘poor man’.

Fable 485 (Phaedrus *App.* 8 = Perry 536)

The Oracle of Apollo

‘I beseech you, reveal the way that is best for us, O Phoebus Apollo, you who dwell in Delphi and have your home on fair Parnassus.’ At

these words, the hair on the head of the consecrated priestess of the oracle suddenly stood on end, the tripods began to shake, and the roar of Religion boomed from the inner shine, while the laurels trembled and the day itself grew pale. Struck by the god, the Pythian priestess uttered these words, 'Listen, O nations, to the counsels of Apollo, the god of Delos: abide in piety; make good your promises to the gods in heaven; defend with military might your homeland and your parents, your children and your faithful wives; drive the enemy away with the sword; sustain your friends and be kind to the victims of misfortune; give aid to honest people and oppose lying scoundrels; avenge acts of crime and rebuke the wicked; punish all those who pollute the marriage bed with perverted adultery; watch out for evil-doers and trust no one too much.' Having pronounced these words, the virgin priestess fell into a raging frenzy—and she was truly enraged, since her words had been spoken in vain.

NOTE: Delphi is located on the slopes of Mount Parnassus, and the priestess of Apollo at Delphi is called the 'Pythia'. The laurel is a plant sacred to Apollo, and Delos was the island where he was born.

FABLES ABOUT GIVING ADVICE TO FOOLS

Fable 486 (Chambry 277* = Perry 186)

The Driver and the Donkey on the Cliff

A donkey had turned aside from the main road and was heading for a cliff. The driver shouted at him, ‘Where are you going, you wretched beast?’ He grabbed hold of the donkey’s tail and tried to drag him back from the cliff, but the donkey did not stop and instead kept going forward. So the man pushed the donkey even harder than he had pulled him back and said, ‘Go ahead then! You can take the worthless victor’s crown in this damned contest.’

The fable criticizes people who are destroyed by their own stupidity.

Fable 487 (Ademar 20 = Perry 39)

The Swallow and the Other Birds

Some birds who had flocked together saw a man sowing flax seed, but they thought nothing of it. The swallow, however, understood what this meant. She called an assembly of the birds and explained that this was an altogether dangerous situation, but the other birds just laughed at her. When the flax seed sprouted, the swallow warned the birds again, ‘This is something dangerous; let’s go and pull it up. If it is allowed to grow, people will make it into nets and we will not able to escape the traps that they devise.’ The birds mocked the swallow’s words and scorned her advice. So the swallow went to the people and began to make her nest only under the roofs of their houses. Meanwhile, the other birds refused to heed the swallow’s warnings, so now they are constantly being trapped in nets and snares.

Fable 488 (Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 12 = Perry 437)

The Owl and the Other Birds

Since the owl was a wise bird, she advised the other birds when the first oak tree sprouted that they should not allow it to grow. If they didn't uproot the tree at all costs, it would produce an inescapable substance, birdlime, that would bring about their death and destruction. Later on, when the people began to sow flax, the owl told the birds that they should pluck out the flax seed, since it was also going to wreak havoc on the birds. The third time, the owl saw a man with a bow and she said that the man would overtake them with their own feathers: although the man walked on foot he would be able to launch arrows with wings. Each time the birds refused to heed the owl's advice. They acted as if she were crazy and said she was out of her mind. As things turned out, the birds discovered, much to their surprise, that the owl had been right all along. Therefore, whenever any other bird encounters the owl, they now treat her with reverence, as if she were an expert in everything. But the owl does not give them advice any more; she only complains.

NOTE: Perry also includes a second passage from Dio Chrysostom (*Orations* 72) which includes this same story. For a fable about a bird being shot by his own feathers, see Fable 43.

Fable 489 (Phaedrus *App*. 18 = Perry 546)

The Rooster and the Cats

There was a rooster who employed cats as his litter-bearers. When the fox saw the rooster being proudly carried about in this way, she said to him, ‘I advise you to beware of treachery: if you look into the faces of those cats, you will realize that they are not bearing a burden—they are carting off loot!’ Afterwards, when the pack of cats began to grow hungry, they tore their lord to pieces and divided his remains amongst themselves.

NOTE: There is a promythium appended to the fable in Perotti’s Appendix: ‘Overconfidence often leads people into danger.’

Fable 490 (Chambry 67* = Perry 69)

The Two Frogs by the Road

There were two frogs who lived near one another. One lived in a deep pond that was far away from the road, but the other lived near the road where there was only a small amount of water. The frog who lived in the deep pond advised the other frog to move in with him so that they could share the pond between them and live a life that was less fraught with danger. The roadside frog refused the offer, saying that he had become accustomed to his home and couldn’t tear himself away. Not long afterwards, he was crushed under the wheel of a passing wagon.

The same is true of people who persist in some worthless activity: before they know it, they’ve lost everything.

Fable 491 (Lucian, *Hermotimus* 84 = Perry 429)

The Fox and the Man Counting the Waves

Aesop tells this story. A certain man was sitting on the beach counting the waves as they broke against the shore. When he lost count of the waves he grew angry and frustrated. A sly fox then approached the man and said, ‘Good sir, what is the point of becoming angry about the waves that have already gone by? You need to just put them out of your mind and pick up counting again where you left off!’

FABLES ABOUT RAISING CHILDREN

Fable 492 (Phaedrus *App*. 12 = Perry 540)

The Old Bull and the Young Bull

A father had an unmanageable son who indulged his vicious adolescent temper by brutally whipping the slaves whenever his father wasn’t looking. Aesop therefore shared this little story with the father. ‘A farmer once yoked an old bull to a young bull. The old bull tried to escape being yoked to this mismatched partner, complaining that his strength had become feeble with age. The farmer said to the bull, “Have no fear. I am not doing this to make you work but so that you will keep the young bull in check, seeing as how he has lamed many of the other bulls with his kicking and butting.” So too you must always keep that boy beside you in order to restrain his reckless inclinations with your own moderation, or else you will end up with even greater cause for complaint in your household.’

A mild disposition can put a stop to vicious behaviour.

NOTE: Compare the English proverb, ‘an old ox makes a straight furrow’ (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*).

Fable 493 (Babrius 47 = Perry 53)

The Old Man and His Sons

Among the folk of days gone by, there was a very elderly gentleman who had many sons. When he was about to reach the end of his life, the old man asked his sons to bring to him a bundle of slender rods, if there happened to be some lying about. One of his sons came and brought the bundle to his father. ‘Now try, with all your might, my sons, to break these rods that have been bound together.’ They were not able to do so. The father then said, ‘Now try to break them one by one.’ Each rod was easily broken. ‘O my sons,’ he said, ‘if you are all of the same mind, then no one can do you any harm, no matter how great his power. But if your intentions differ from one another, then what happened to the single rods is what will happen to each of you!’

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: ‘Brotherly love is mankind’s greatest good; even the lowly are exalted by it.’ This story was associated with a Scythian king who supposedly shared this lesson with all eighty of his surviving sons (see Scilurus, in Plutarch, *Sayings of the Kings and Commanders*).

Fable 494 (Chambry 83* = Perry 42)

The Farmer and His Sons

A farmer who was about to die wanted his sons to be knowledgeable about the farm, so he summoned them and said, ‘My children, there is a treasure buried in one of my vineyards.’ After he died, his sons took ploughs and mattocks and dug up the entire farm. They did not find any treasure, but the vineyard paid them back with a greatly increased harvest.

Thus they learned that man’s greatest treasure consists in work.

Fable 495 (Phaedrus 3.8 = Perry 499)

The Children and the Mirror

Pay heed to this advice, and take stock of yourself regularly.

There was a man who had an extremely ugly daughter and a son who was remarkable for his good looks. While the two of them were playing childish games, they happened to look into a mirror which had been left lying on their mother’s armchair. The boy boasted about his beauty, and this made the girl angry. She couldn’t stand her boastful brother’s jokes, since she naturally took everything he said as a slight against herself. Spurred by jealousy, the girl wanted to get back at her brother, so she went running to their father and accused her brother of having touched something that was only for women, even though he was a man. The father hugged and kissed his children, bestowing his tender affection on them both, and said,

‘I want you to use the mirror each and every day: you, my son, so that you will remember not to spoil your good looks by behaving badly, and you, my daughter, so that you will remember to compensate for your appearance by the good quality of your character.’

NOTE: Compare the advice of Socrates (cited in Plutarch, *Advice on Marriage* 25) that all young men should look at themselves in mirrors: unattractive men should look at themselves in order to be prompted to practise virtue, while good-looking men should be reminded to avoid the disfigurement of vice.

Fable 496 (Chambry 296* = Perry 200)

The Thief and His Mother

A boy who was carrying his teacher’s writing tablet stole it and brought it triumphantly home to his mother who received the stolen goods with much delight. Next, the boy stole a piece of clothing, and by degrees he became a habitual criminal. As the boy grew older and became an adult, he stole items of greater and greater value. Time passed, and the man was finally caught in the act and taken off to court where he was condemned to death: woe betide the trade of the thief! His mother stood behind him, weeping as she shouted, ‘My son, what has become of you?’ He said to his mother, ‘Come closer, mother, and I will give you a final kiss.’ She went up to him, and all of a sudden he bit her nose, tugging at it with his teeth until he cut it clean off. Then he said to her, ‘Mother, if only

you had beaten me at the very beginning when I brought you the writing tablet, then I would not have been condemned to death!'

This is what the story tells us: if you are wise, you will tear out vice by the roots, in other words, at the very beginning of sinfulness and other wickedness, so that the severing of the root will cause the branches to wither away.

NOTE: In other versions of this story (included in Chambry's first edition of the Greek fables), the son bites off his mother's ear, rather than her nose.

Fable 497 (Babrius 35 = Perry 218)

The Monkey and Her Two Children

The monkey gives birth to two babies, but after giving birth she does not mother them equally. She comforts one of them with cruel embraces, choking him with her unfortunate affection; meanwhile, she casts the other child away as superfluous and unimportant. This is the one who goes off into the wilds and is able to survive.

The same thing can be said about certain people: in such cases, it is better to be their enemy than their friend.

NOTE: For another fable about the monkey and her offspring, see Fable 253.

Fable 498 (Phaedrus 3.15 = Perry 506)

The Dog and the Lamb Among the Goats

A dog met a lamb who was bleating among the she-goats and said, ‘You fool, your mother is not here.’ As he spoke, the dog pointed to a separate flock of sheep grazing in the distance. ‘I do not want that mother!’ said the lamb. ‘She conceives when it is her pleasure, carries her unknown burden for a certain number of months, and in the end she simply lets go and plops her bundle on the ground. No, I am looking for the mother who offers me her udder and feeds me, and even cheats her own children of milk so that I will not go hungry.’ ‘Still, the one who gave birth to you is more important’, said the dog. ‘Not correct’, replied the lamb. ‘Was it some great favour that she brought me into the world when I might expect the arrival of the butcher at any moment? Could she even be certain whether I would be born black or white? And if perhaps she would have preferred a girl, what would she have thought of me, since I am a boy? Given that she took no decision in the matter of my conception, why should I now prefer that mother to the mother who took pity on me as I was lying there and who freely offers me her sweet affection?’

Parents are determined by love, not fate.

NOTE: There are an additional two lines sometimes printed with the poem which most editors reject as spurious. Those lines read: ‘With this poem the author wanted to show that people resist laws but are favourably inclined to acts of good will.’

II · AETIOLOGIES, PARADOXES, INSULTS, AND JOKES

AETIOLOGIES OF THE ANIMALS

Fable 499 (Aristophanes, *Birds* 471 ff. = Perry 447)

The Lark and Her Crest

Aesop says that the crested lark was the first bird to be created, even before Gaia, the Earth. As a result, when the lark's father became sick and died, there was no earth to bury him in. On the fifth day that his body had been lying there, the frustrated lark, not knowing what else to do, buried her father in her own head.

NOTE: Aelian, *Characteristics of Animals* 16.5, links this story in Aristophanes to a similar story about the hoopoe which he claims to have found in the legends of 'Indian Brahmins'. Both stories provide an aetiology for the bird's crest of feathers, although the metamorphosis of the lark is only implied in the Greek version.

Fable 500 (Syntipas 36 = Perry 171)

The Bat, the Booby, and the Bramble Bush

The bat, the booby, and the bramble bush made a corporation and went into business together. The bat got some gold on credit, the booby some copper, and the bramble bush some clothing. They

loaded the goods on a ship and immediately set sail. All of a sudden the sea began to surge and a squall blew up, churning the waters into an immense wave which broke the ship into pieces and sent everything on board down to the bottom of the sea. Ever since that time, the bat has flapped in headlong flight from her creditors, hiding herself away and venturing out only at night; the booby spends his time on the sea, looking for the copper; and the bramble bush grabs hold of every wayfarer's cloak, hoping to find the missing clothes.

This fable shows that after some risky business has come to an end, everyone must stay attentive so that they don't fall into the same misfortune once again.

NOTE: The bird referred to here (Greek *kepphos*) was a type of seabird proverbial for stupidity, hence the English translation 'booby'.

Fable 501 (Syntipas 32 = Perry 119)

The Vegetables and the Weeds

Somebody saw a gardener irrigating his vegetables and said to him, 'How is it that wild plants, without having been planted and without having been cultivated, spring up each season, while the plants that you yourself plant in the garden frequently wither from lack of water?' The gardener replied, 'The wild plants are cared for by

divine providence, which is sufficient in and of itself, while our own plants must depend for their care on human hands.'

This story shows that a mother's nurturing is stronger than a stepmother's attentions.

NOTE: In another version of this story (*Life of Aesop* 37), it is Aesop who explains to an ignorant gardener why it is that weeds grow so quickly.

Fable 502 (Babrius 74 = Perry 105)

The Man, the Horse, the Ox, and the Dog

A horse, an ox, and a dog were suffering from the cold and came to the house of a man. The man opened his door to the animals and led them inside. He warmed them by the hearth which was blazing with fire and placed before them whatever there was to eat. To the horse he gave barley, to the labouring ox he gave peas, while the dog took his place beside the man at the table as his dinner companion. In exchange for this hospitality, the animals surrendered to the man some of the years of life that had been allotted to them. The horse went first, which is why each of us is inclined to exult in our youth; the ox went next, which is why man toils away during his middle years, devoted to his work and accumulating wealth. It was the dog who bestowed on man his final years, at least according to the story. This is why, Branchus, everyone becomes cranky in his old age, only

wagging his tail for the person who feeds him while barking incessantly and snarling at strangers.

NOTE: Here and in the prologue to his fables, Babrius addresses a young boy, ‘Branchus’, whom he calls the son of ‘King Alexander’, tentatively identified as King Alexander of Cilicia. If this is correct, Babrius would have lived in the second half of the first century CE.

Fable 503 (Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 32 = Perry 448)

Orpheus and the Dogs

The animals were Orpheus’ companions, and while they enjoyed and admired his music, they never attempted to imitate it. But a few of the dogs, those shameless and meddlesome creatures, set out to make some music of their own. They straightaway went off by themselves to practise, changing themselves into human form as they continued their musical pursuits. This is where lyre players come from, and even today they cannot completely overcome their inborn nature. As a result, they preserve the teachings of Orpheus, but only to a small degree; for the most part it is the canine music that endures.

NOTE: Orpheus was the master musician of Greek mythology.

Fable 504 (*Life of Aesop* 126 = Perry 382)

The Delphians and Their Ancestors

The people of Delphi said to Aesop, ‘Who were our ancestors?’ Aesop replied, ‘They were slaves. And if you are ignorant of this story, it is about time you learned it! Long ago it was the custom that whenever the Greeks captured a city, they would send one-tenth of the spoils to Apollo. So they would send ten oxen out of every hundred, the same with goats, and the same with other things: money, women, men. Since you are the descendants of those men and women, you are deprived of your freedom, like slaves in bondage. That is your origin, and thus you have become the slaves of all the Greeks.’

NOTE: It was this kind of talk that provoked the Delphians to arrange for Aesop’s execution (as detailed in the *Life of Aesop*).

Fable 505 (Chambry 9* = Perry 277)

The Swallow and the Nightingale

A swallow once asked a nightingale why she didn’t want to come and take up residence with her. The nightingale wept and cried, ‘No, it is impossible for me to do that. It brings to mind the grief suffered by my ancestors, which is why I dwell in the wilderness.’

The fable shows that when people feel grief for their misfortunes, they avoid the place where that grief overtook them.

NOTE: This fable is based on the well-known story of Procne and Philomela (see Fable 213 and the note to that fable). For an

explanation of why the swallow decided to dwell in people's houses, see Fable 487.

Fable 506 (Aphthonius 3 = Perry 396)

The Kites and the Swans

A story about kites and swans, exhorting us not to imitate things that are inappropriate to us.

Nature originally supplied the kites with a voice equal to that of the swans. But when the kites heard the sound of horses neighing, they were enchanted and tried to imitate it. In the course of their studies, the kites lost what voice they had: they did not learn how to neigh, and they forgot how to sing.

By imitating something inappropriate, you can lose what you had to begin with.

Fable 507 (Phaedrus 3.18 = Perry 509)

Juno and the Peacock

The peacock came to see Juno, because he could not accept with equanimity the fact that the goddess had not given him the song of the nightingale. The peacock complained that the nightingale's song was wondrously beautiful to every ear, while he was laughed at by everyone as soon as he made the slightest sound. Juno then consoled the peacock and said, 'You are superior in beauty and superior in size; there is an emerald splendour that shines about your neck, and your tail is a fan filled with jewels and painted

feathers.' The peacock protested, 'What is the point of this silent beauty, if I am defeated by the sound of my own voice?' 'Your lot in life has been assigned by the decision of the Fates,' said Juno. 'You have been allotted beauty; the eagle, strength; the nightingale, harmony; the raven has been assigned prophetic signs, while unfavourable omens are assigned to the crow; and so each is content with his own particular gift.'

Do not strive for something that was not given to you, lest your disappointed expectations become mired in discontent.

NOTE: Juno (Greek Hera) was the consort of Jupiter and queen of the gods. Just as the eagle was Jupiter's special bird, the peacock was dear to Juno.

Fable 508 (Chambry 125* = Perry 106)

Zeus and the Tortoise

Zeus invited all the animals to his wedding. The tortoise alone was absent, and Zeus did not know why, so he asked the tortoise her reason for not having come to the feast. The tortoise said, 'Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.' Zeus got angry at the tortoise and ordered her to carry her house with her wherever she went.

The fable shows that people often prefer to live simply at home than to live lavishly at someone else's house.

NOTE: The Greek maxim pronounced by the tortoise can be translated literally as ‘home is dear, home is best’, *oikos philos, oikos aristos*.

Fable 509 (Chambry 234* = Perry 163)

Zeus and the Bee

The bee, who is the mother of the honeycombs, went up to the gods, bearing honeycombs and honey. Delighted by the bee’s offering, Zeus ordered that she be given whatever she asked for. The bee said, ‘Bestow upon your servant a sting so that I can defend the fruits of my labour and protect myself.’ Zeus was at a loss when faced with his request, since he felt affection for the human race. He therefore told the bee, ‘I cannot do exactly that: but if some man does come to take your honey and you want to get rid of him, here is your sting! Yet you must keep in mind that if you strike a man, you will die at the moment your sting has gone in.’

The fable shows that in our prayers and requests we should never ask for evil to befall our enemies.

Fable 510 (Syntipas 59 = Perry 117)

Zeus and the Camel

When the camel saw another animal’s horns, she begged Zeus to give her horns too. Zeus was angry at the camel’s greediness, so he cropped her ears instead.

This fable shows that people who grasp for more than they need are deprived of what they have.

Fable 511 (Romulus Ang. 19 = Perry 658)

Jupiter and the Hare

A certain hare happened to see a stag adorned with great branching horns. The hare complained to Jupiter that the hares were weak, defective creatures who were not feared by any of the other animals. Therefore, he wanted Jupiter to give him horns like those of the stag both for his own protection and to enhance his appearance. Jupiter told the hare that he would not be able to carry the heavy weight of the horns, but the hare replied that he was prepared to carry such horns with pride. Jupiter therefore commanded that the hare's head should be crowned with a pair of big, branching horns, but the hare was so weighed down by his burden that he wasn't able to run. As a result, the shepherds captured and killed him.

If is often the case that people are greedy for things which they think will bring them honour, but which only result in their death and destruction.

NOTE: For another fable about the hares who want to be feared by other animals, see Fable 248.

Fable 512 (Phaedrus 4.17 = Perry 516)

Jupiter and the Goats

When the she-goats had persuaded Jupiter to give them beards, the male goats were extremely upset and began to complain that the women now had the same degree of dignity that they did. ‘Come now,’ said Jupiter, ‘let the women enjoy this vain source of pride and stake their claim to the badges of your office so long as they cannot rival you in strength!’

Let this be a sign that you should put up with people who wear the same uniform as you do, even if they are not your equals in valour.

Fable 513 (Chambry 240* = Perry 166)

Zeus and the Ant

Long ago, the creature who is today an ant used to be a man who was always busy farming. Still, he was not satisfied with the results of his own labour, so he would steal from his neighbours’ crops. Zeus became angry at his greedy behaviour and turned him into the animal that now has the name of ‘ant’. Yet although the man changed his shape, he did not change his habits, and even now he goes around the fields gathering the fruits of other people’s labour, storing them up for himself.

The fable shows that when someone with a wicked nature changes his appearance, his behaviour remains the same.

HUMAN AETIOLOGIES

Fable 514 (Chambry 57 = Perry 311)

Zeus and Man

They say that in the beginning, when the animals were being formed, they received their endowments from Zeus. To some he gave strength, and to some speed, and to others wings. Man, however, was still naked so he said to Zeus, 'I am the only one that you have left without a gift.' Zeus replied, 'You are unaware of the gift you have obtained, but it is the greatest gift of all: you have received the gift of speech and the ability to reason, which has power both among the gods and among mortals; it is stronger than the strong and swifter than the swift.' Man then recognized the gift he had been given and bowed down before Zeus, offering him thanks.

The fable shows that while we have all been honoured by God with the gift of speech and reason, there are some who are unaware of this great honour and are instead jealous of the animals even though the animals lack both speech and sense.

NOTE: The gift given to mankind is called *logos* in Greek, which refers both to speech and to rational thought. The Greeks regularly referred to animals as *aloga*, or lacking in *logos*. This Greek phrase thus has a double meaning much like the English expression 'dumb animals', which is used to indicate animals who are both speechless and (supposedly) stupid. For a different account of the creation, see Plato, *Protagoras* 320 ff., where the defenceless human race is armed by Prometheus with fire.

Fable 515 (Chambry 322 = Perry 240)

Zeus and Prometheus

Following Zeus' orders, Prometheus fashioned humans and animals. When Zeus saw that the animals far outnumbered the humans, he ordered Prometheus to reduce the number of the animals by turning them into people. Prometheus did as he was told, and as a result those people who were originally animals have a human body but the soul of an animal.

This fable is suitable for a man who is rough and brutal.

Fable 516 (Themistius, *Orations* 32 = Perry 430)

Prometheus and the Tears

This is also something that Aesop said. The clay which Prometheus used when he fashioned man was not mixed with water but with tears. Therefore, one should not try to dispense entirely with tears, since they are inevitable.

Fable 517 (Phaedrus 4.16 = Perry 515)

Prometheus and Bacchus

Someone asked Aesop why lesbians and fairies had been created, and old Aesop explained, 'The answer lies once again with Prometheus, the original creator of our common clay (which shatters as soon as it hits a bit of bad luck). All day long, Prometheus had been separately shaping those natural members

which Shame conceals beneath our clothes, and when he was about to apply these private parts to the appropriate bodies Bacchus unexpectedly invited him to dinner. Prometheus came home late, unsteady on his feet and with a good deal of heavenly nectar flowing through his veins. With his wits half asleep in a drunken haze he stuck the female genitalia on male bodies and male members on the ladies. This is why modern lust revels in perverted pleasures.'

NOTE: The fable immediately preceding this one in Book 4 of Phaedrus' fables is badly fragmented and only two lines remain: '[Prometheus made?] the woman's tongue by redeploying her private parts. This is where the obscene practice [fellatio?] finds its affinity.'

Fable 518 (Babrius 59 = Perry 100)

Momus and the Gods

The story goes that Zeus, Poseidon, and Athena were arguing about who could make something truly good. Zeus made the most excellent of all animals, man, while Athena made a house for people to live in, and, when it was his turn, Poseidon made a bull. Momus was selected to judge the competition, for he was still living among the gods at that time. Given that Momus was inclined to dislike them all, he immediately started to criticize the bull for not having eyes under his horns to let him take aim when he gored something; he criticized man for not having been given a window into his heart

so that his neighbour could see what he was planning; and he criticized the house because it had not been made with iron wheels at its base, which would have made it possible for the owners of the house to move it from place to place when they went travelling.

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: 'What then does the plot of this story tell us? Try to make something, and do not let envy pass judgement on it. Nothing is entirely satisfactory to someone who is a Momus.' In Greek mythology, Momus was the archetypal fault-finder, the personification of 'blame' or 'reproach'. Parts of this fable are alluded to in Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 15.50 (the absence of a window into the heart) and in Aristotle, *Parts of Animals* 3.2 (the bull and his horns).

Fable 519 (Chambry 111 = Perry 103)

Hermes and the Cobblers

Zeus ordered Hermes to instill a dose of deceit in every craftsman. With a pestle and mortar, Hermes ground the drug into a fine powder and after dividing it into equal portions he began to apply it to each of the craftsmen. In the end, only the cobbler was left and a great deal of the drug was still left over, so Hermes poured the entire contents of the mortar onto the cobbler. As a result, all craftsmen are liars, but cobblers are the worst of all.

This fable is suitable for a man who tells lies.

NOTE: For a fable about a lying cobbler, see Fable 588.

Fable 520 (Chambry 120 = Perry 108)

Hermes and the Dose of Intelligence

After Zeus had fashioned the human race, he ordered Hermes to give them intelligence. Hermes divided intelligence into equal portions and then applied it to each person. The result was that short people became wise, since they were more completely suffused with the standard dose of intelligence, while the tall people turned out stupid, since the potion that was poured into their bodies did not even reach as high as their knees.

This fable is suitable for a man who is physically large but whose mind is lacking in reason.

Fable 521 (Babrius 57 = Perry 309)

Hermes and the Arabs

Hermes filled a cart with lies and dishonesty and all sorts of wicked tricks, and he journeyed in this cart throughout the land, going hither and thither from one tribe to another, dispensing to each nation a small portion of his wares. When he reached the land of the Arabs, so the story goes, his cart suddenly broke down along the way and was stuck there. The Arabs seized the contents of the cart as if it were a merchant's valuable cargo, stripping the cart bare and preventing Hermes from continuing on his journey, although there were still some people he had not yet visited. As a result, Arabs are

liars and charlatans, as I myself have learned from experience. There is not a word of truth that springs from their lips.

Fable 522 (Chambry 109 = Perry 102)

Hermes and the Earth

When Zeus had fashioned man and woman, he ordered Hermes to take them to Gaia, the Earth, and to show them how to obtain food by digging in the ground. At first, the Earth refused to co-operate in Hermes' mission. Hermes then compelled her, saying that Zeus had ordered her to do so. Earth replied, 'Then let them dig as much as they like, but they will pay for it with groans and tears!'

This fable is suitable for those people who casually take out loans but who then find it difficult to pay them back.

Fable 523 (Phaedrus 4.11 = Perry 513)

The Thief and the Lamp

A thief lit his lamp from the altar of Jupiter and then robbed the god by the light of his own fire. When he left, laden with the spoils of sacrilege, holy Religion herself suddenly began to speak: 'Although those gifts were the offerings of a wicked man and therefore hateful to me (so that I am in no way offended by their theft), you will nevertheless pay for this with your life, you villain, when the day of your assigned punishment arrives! However, so that our fire—this fire which the pious employ in their worship of the awesome gods—may never serve to illuminate the path of crime, I

hereby forbid all such traffic in light.' This is why even today one may no longer light a lamp from the flame that is sacred to the gods, nor is it permitted to use a lamp to light the sacred fire.

Only the author who devised this story, and no on else, can explain to you how many useful lessons it contains. First of all, it shows that someone that you yourself have supported often proves to be your worst enemy; second, it shows that crimes are not punished by the wrath of the gods but only at the time that is decreed by the Fates; finally, it forbids good people to have anything in common with evil-doers.

Fable 524 (Babrius 127 = Perry 313)

Zeus and the Potsherds

Zeus ordered Hermes to write down people's sins and wicked deeds on potsherds and to pile them in a designated box, so that Zeus could then peruse them and exact a penalty from each person as appropriate. Given that the potsherds are all piled up one on top of the other until the moment that Zeus examines them, he gets to some of them quite soon while others have to wait. It is therefore no surprise that there are wicked people who commit a crime in haste but who are not punished until much later.

NOTE: Potsherds, or broken bits of pottery, were used as writing material in ancient Greece, most notably for recording votes. Thus the Greek word for potsherds, *ostraca*, gave rise to the English

word ‘ostracism’, from votes being cast in favour of someone’s banishment.

Fable 525 (Chambry 1 = Perry 274)

Zeus and the Good Things

The Good Things were too weak to defend themselves from the Bad Things, so the Bad Things drove them off to heaven. The Good Things then asked Zeus how they could reach mankind. Zeus told them that they should not go together all at once, only one at a time. This is why people are constantly besieged by Bad Things, since they are nearby, while Good Things come more rarely, since they must descend to us from heaven one by one.

The fable shows that good things do not happen very often, while bad things happen to us all the time.

Fable 526 (Babrius 58 = Perry 312)

Zeus and the Jar of Good Things

Zeus gathered all the useful things together in a jar and put a lid on it. He then left the jar in human hands. But man had no self-control and he wanted to know what was in that jar, so he pushed the lid aside, letting those things go back to the abode of the gods. Thus all the good things flew away, soaring high above the earth, and Hope was the only thing left. When the lid was put back on the jar, Hope was kept inside. That is why Hope alone is still found among the

people, promising that she will bestow on each of us the good things that have gone away.

NOTE: Unlike the famous 'Pandora's box' version of this story (which is attested as early as the eighth century BCE in the Greek poet Hesiod), this version notably does not blame all the misfortune of the world on a woman.

Fable 527 (Phaedrus 4.10 = Perry 266)

Jupiter and the Two Sacks

Jupiter has given us two sacks to carry. One sack, which is filled with our own faults, is slung across our back, while the other sack, heavy with the faults of others, is tied around our necks. This is the reason why we are blind to our own bad habits but still quick to criticize others for their mistakes.

NOTE: There is a similar saying in Seneca, *On Anger* 2.28: 'other people's faults are directly in front of our eyes, while our own faults are behind our backs.' In the Greek versions of this fable (e.g. Chambry 303), it is Prometheus, not Zeus, who fashions the sacks.

Fable 528 (Chambry 118* = Perry 109)

Zeus and Shame

After he had created people, Zeus immediately implanted in them all the possible human character traits, but he forgot about Shame.

Since he didn't know how to get Shame inside the human body, he ordered her to go in from behind. At first Shame protested, considering Zeus's request to be beneath her dignity. When Zeus kept insisting, she said, 'All right, I will go in there, on the condition that if anything comes in there after me, I will leave immediately.' As a result, people who engage in sodomy have no sense of shame.

This fable can be used for a sodomite.

Fable 529 (*life of Aesop* 33 = Perry 385)

True Dreams and False Dreams

Apollo, who is the leader of the Muses, once asked Zeus to give him the power of foresight, so that he could be the best oracle. Zeus agreed, but when Apollo was then able to provoke the wonder of all mankind, he began to think that he was better than all the other gods and he treated them with even greater arrogance than before. This angered Zeus (and he was Apollo's superior, after all). Since Zeus didn't want Apollo to have so much power over people, he devised a true kind of dream that would reveal to people in their sleep what was going to happen. When Apollo realized that no one would need him for his prophecies any more, he asked Zeus to be reconciled to him, imploring Zeus not to subvert his own prophetic power. Zeus forgave Apollo and proceeded to devise yet more dreams for mankind, so that there were now false dreams that came to them in their sleep, in addition to the true dreams. Once the

people realized that their dreams were unreliable, they had to turn once again to Apollo, the original source of prophetic divination.

ALLEGORIES

Fable 530 (Phaedrus *App*. 5 = Perry 535)

Prometheus and Truth

Prometheus, that potter who first gave shape to our generation, decided one day to sculpt a statue of Truth, using all his skill so that she would be able to regulate people's behaviour. As he was working, an unexpected summons from mighty Jupiter called him away. Prometheus left cunning Trickery in charge of his workshop (Trickery had recently become one of the god's apprentices). Fired by ambition, Trickery used the time at his disposal to fashion with his sly fingers a figure of the same size and appearance as Truth with identical features. When he had almost completed the piece, which was truly remarkable, he ran out of clay to use for her feet. The master returned, so Trickery quickly sat down in his seat, quaking with fear. Prometheus was amazed at the similarity of the two statues and wanted it to seem as if all the credit were due to his own skill. Therefore, he put both statues in the kiln and when they had been thoroughly baked, he infused them both with life: sacred Truth walked with measured steps, while her unfinished twin stood stuck in her tracks. That forgery, the product of subterfuge, thus acquired the name of Falsehood, and I readily agree with people who say that she has no feet: every once in a while something that

is false can start off successfully, but with time the Truth is sure to prevail.

Fable 531 (Babrius 126 = Perry 355)

Truth in the Wilderness

A man was journeying in the wilderness and he found Truth standing there all alone. He said to her, ‘Ancient lady, why do you dwell here in the wilderness, leaving the city behind?’ From the great depths of her wisdom, Truth replied, ‘Among the people of old, lies were found among only a few, but now they have spread throughout all of human society!’

were found among only a few, but now they have spread throughout all of human society!’

NOTE: An epimythium added to the fable reads: ‘If you want to hear my opinion: the way people live these days is scandalous!’

Fable 532 (Plato, *Phaedo* 60b = Perry 445)

Pleasure and Pain

Socrates said, ‘If Aesop had thought about pleasure and pain, he would have composed a fable about how when Pleasure and Pain were at war with one another, the god wanted to reconcile them. But as he was not able to do that, he joined them together at the head, which is why when you meet with either pleasure or pain, the other one soon follows.’

NOTE: As recounted in Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates is supposed to have composed Aesopic fables in verse while he was in prison, awaiting execution.

Fable 533 (Babrius 70 = Perry 367)

War and His Bride

The gods were getting married. One after another, they all got hitched, until finally it was time for War to draw his lot, the last of the bachelors. Hubris, or Reckless Pride, became his wife, since she was the only one left without a husband. They say War loved Hubris with such abandon that he still follows her everywhere she goes. So do not ever allow Hubris to come upon the nations or cities of mankind, smiling fondly at the crowds, because War will be coming right behind her.

NOTE: *Hubris* is a Greek word meaning reckless pride or insolence; as a feminine noun, *hubris* is, allegorically, a woman.

Fable 534 (Chambry 129* = Perry 316)

Heracles and Athena

Heracles was making his way through a narrow pass. He saw something that looked like an apple lying on the ground and he tried to smash it with his club. After having been struck by the club, the thing swelled up to twice its size. Heracles struck it again with his club, even harder than before, and the thing then expanded to

such a size that it blocked Heracles' way. Heracles let go of his club and stood there, amazed. Athena saw him and said, 'O Heracles, don't be so surprised! This thing that has brought about your confusion is Contentiousness and Strife. If you just leave it alone, it stays small; but if you decide to fight it, then it swells from its small size and grows large.'

Fable 535 (*Life of Aesop* 94 = Perry 383)

Prometheus and the Two Roads

Zeus once ordered Prometheus to show mankind the two ways: one the way of freedom and the other the way of slavery. Prometheus made the way of freedom rough at the beginning, impassable and steep, with no water anywhere to drink, full of brambles, and beset with dangers on all sides at first. Eventually, however, it became a smooth plain, lined with paths and filled with groves of fruit trees and waterways. Thus the distressing experience ended in repose for those who breathe the air of freedom. The way of slavery, however, started out as a smooth plain at the beginning, full of flowers, pleasant to look at and quite luxurious, but in the end it became impassable, steep and insurmountable on all sides.

NOTE: In another version of the story (manuscript 'G'), the allegory is attributed to Tyche, the goddess of fortune or fate, rather than to Prometheus. There are some obvious similarities between this story and the famous account of Heracles choosing between two

roads (see Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21; see also the two roads in Hesiod, *Works and Days* 285).

Fable 536 (Phaedrus 5.8 = Perry 530)

Opportunity

Running swiftly, balancing on the razor's edge, bald but with a lock of hair on his forehead, he wears no clothes; if you grasp him from the front, you might be able to hold him, but once he has moved on not even Jupiter himself can pull him back: this is a symbol of Opportunity, the brief moment in which things are possible.

Men of old invented this particular image of Time so that our efforts would not be undermined by laziness or hesitation.

NOTE: This fable is based on a famous statue of *Kairos*, 'Opportunity', by Lysippus, a famous Greek sculptor of the fourth century BCE (the statue is described in Posidippus, *Anthologia Planudea* 275 and Ausonius, *Epigrams* 11).

Fable 537 (Phaedrus 3.14 = Perry 505)

Aesop and the Bow

When a certain man of Athens saw Aesop playing with marbles amidst a crowd of boys, he stood there and laughed at him as if Aesop were crazy. As soon as he realized what was going on, Aesop —who was an old man far more inclined to laugh at others than to be laughed at himself—took an unstrung bow and placed it in the

middle of the road. ‘Okay, you know-it-all,’ he said, ‘explain the meaning of what I just did.’ All the people gathered round. The man racked his brains for a long time but he could not manage to answer Aesop’s question. Eventually he gave up. Having won this battle of wits, Aesop then explained, ‘If you keep your bow tightly strung at all times, it will quickly break, but if you let it rest, it will be ready to use whenever you need it.’

In the same way the mind must he given some amusement from time to time, so that you will find yourself able to think more clearly afterwards.

NOTE: The motif of the bow resting and tensed was a Roman cliché (e.g. Horace, *Odes* 2.10: ‘Apollo does not always stretch the bow’). There is a similar story in the ‘Life of Saint Anthony’ (*Golden Legend* 21): an archer is angry when he sees Saint Anthony resting, so Saint Anthony then tells the man to shoot an arrow, then another arrow, then another, until finally the man says ‘If I keep on like this, my bow will break!’ Saint Anthony concludes that it is the same way with people: they will break if they are never allowed to take a rest.

PARADOXES

Fable 538 (Phaedrus 1.18 = Perry 479)

The Woman in Labour

No one gladly revisits a place where he got hurt.

After her months of pregnancy had passed, a woman about to deliver her child was lying on the ground, moaning and weeping. Her husband urged her to rest her body on the bed, so that she might better relieve herself of nature's burden, but the woman refused and said, 'I hardly think that my trouble could come to an end in the very place where it was first conceived!'

NOTE: This joke is also found in Plutarch, *Advice on Marriage* 39.

Fable 539 (Babrius 34 = Perry 47)

The Boy and the Tripe

A crowd of country folk had sacrificed a bull to the goddess Demeter, scattering leaves over the wide threshing-floor, while the tables were covered with platters of meat and jars brimming with wine. There was a boy who ate greedily and stuffed himself full with beef tripe. On the way home, he was seized by a stomach ache. Collapsing into his mother's tender embrace, he vomited, and said, 'Woe is me, I'm going to die! Mother, all my guts are falling out!' The mother replied, 'Be brave and throw it all up; don't hold anything back. Those are not your own guts you are vomiting: they are the bull's!'

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: 'This fable might be applied to someone who has squandered the property of an orphan and then weeps and wails when he has to

pay it back.' Alciato, *Emblems* 129, tells the same story not about human beings, but about a kite and his mother.

Fable 540 (Chambry 246* = Perry 66)

The Boys and the Butcher

Two young boys were standing next to the butcher. Then, when the butcher was occupied in some business of his own, one of the boys grabbed a piece of meat and hid it in the folds of the other boy's garment. When the butcher turned around and looked for the meat, the boy who had taken the meat swore he didn't have it, and the one who had the meat swore he hadn't taken it. When the butcher realized the wicked trick the boys had played, he said, 'Even if you manage to deceive me, you will never deceive the god by whom you have sworn falsely!'

The fable shows that even if we succeed in deceiving our fellows by swearing falsely, there is no way that we can deceive the gods.

Fable 541 (Phaedrus *App*. 27 = Perry 554)

Socrates and the Slave

Socrates was being rudely addressed by a slave who had actually seduced his master's wife, a fact which Socrates knew to be familiar to the people who were present. Socrates therefore said to the slave, 'You are pleased with yourself because you are pleasing to someone whom you ought not to please, but don't think you will escape

unpunished, because you are not pleasing the person whom you really ought to please!'

NOTE: There is a promythium appended to the fable in Perotti's Appendix: 'No curse weighs more heavily than a guilty conscience.' For another fable about Socrates in Phaedrus, see Fable 94

Fable 542 (Chambry 56* = Perry 29)

The Charcoal Burner and the Fuller

A charcoal burner who lived in a certain house decided it would be a good idea to live together with a fuller who had moved in next door. But the fuller told him, 'How on earth would I be able to carry on with my work? I am afraid that whatever I washed white, you would cover with soot!'

The story shows that opposites are utterly incompatible.

Fable 543 (Chambry 309* = Perry 204)

The Rich Man and the Tanner

A tanner was about to move in next door to a rich man but the rich man tried to get rid of him on account of the foul smell. The tanner said to him, 'It will bother you for a little while but then you will get used to it, and afterwards you will not even notice the smell.' The rich man said, 'We will not lose our sense of smell simply on account of your profession!'

The fable shows that a person should not accept foolish advice, especially if it is contrary to his nature.

NOTE: For a quite different conclusion to this same situation, see Fable 544 (following).

Fable 544 (Chambry 309 = Perry 204)

The Rich Man and the Tanner

A rich man was living next door to a tanner and could not stand the foul odour. He urged the tanner to move away but the tanner put him off, always saying 'In a little while.' This happened repeatedly, until the rich man got used to the foul odour and didn't bother the tanner any more.

The story shows that familiarity can alleviate seemingly intractable problems.

Fable 545 (pseudo-Diogenian, *Preface* = Perry 425)

The Fisherman and the Octopus

When a fisherman happened to see an octopus during the winter, he said, 'If I take off my clothes and jump in after him, I will freeze! But if I do not catch that octopus, I condemn my children to die of starvation!'

Fable 546 (Chambry 27* = Perry 26)

The Fisherman and the River

A fisherman was fishing in a river. He stretched out his nets and covered the river's stream from one side to the other. He then tied a stone to a piece of rope and struck the water with it so that the fish would flee and fall unwittingly into the net. Someone who lived in that neighbourhood saw what the man was doing and began to complain, because by agitating the river in this way he deprived them of clear water to drink. The fisherman answered, 'But if I do not disturb the river, I will have no choice but to die of hunger!'

The story shows that the same is true in cities too: demagogues are most effective when they stir up sedition in their homelands.

Fable 547 (Chambry 62 = Perry 71)

The Coward and the Lion of Gold

There was a certain greedy coward who found a lion of gold and said, 'I do not know how to act in such circumstances. This is driving me crazy! I can't decide what to do: my love of money and my innate cowardice are tearing me in two. What kind of accident or supernatural power could have produced a lion of gold? My mind is at war with itself when it confronts this problem: it longs for the gold but it fears the object which the gold has been made into. My desire urges me to seize it, but my character urges me to keep away. O Fortune, you have given me this thing but you do not allow it to be taken! O treasure that offers no satisfaction! O welcome gift of a god that is so unwelcome! What to do? How can I get some advantage from this? How can I contrive a means to approach it? I

will go get my servants and bring them here and order them to launch a mass attack and grab the lion, while I watch them from a distance.'

The story is suitable for a rich man who does not dare to touch his wealth or make use of it.

Fable 548 (Chambry 299* = Perry 94)

The Woman and Her Two Daughters

There was a woman who was the mother of two daughters, and she had married them both off: one to a gardener and the other to a potter. She then paid a visit to the daughter who was married to the gardener, and as they talked about things in general the mother asked her daughter how she was faring. The daughter said, 'In general, things are good, but please pray that there will be some rainfall, so that the vegetables will be well-watered and flourish accordingly.' The mother then left and went to see the daughter who was living with the potter. She asked the daughter what she might need, and the daughter replied, 'In general, things are good, mother, but please pray that we have clear weather and hot sunny days without a cloud in the sky so that the pots will dry out more quickly.' At this point the mother said, 'But if you are hoping for clear skies and your sister wants a downpour, then how am I going to pray for the two of you?'

The story shows that people who are conducting two opposite businesses are bound to fail at both of them.

NOTE: Other versions of this story (included in Chambry's first edition of the Greek fables) are about a father and his daughters.

Fable 549 (Phaedrus 4.5 = Perry 512)

The Mother and Her Three Daughters

Often there is more good to be found in one man than in a crowd of people, as I will reveal to posterity in this little story.

A certain man left three daughters at his death. One daughter was very beautiful and always chasing after men with her eyes. Another daughter was the frugal type with country virtues, always spinning wool. The third daughter was quite ugly and entirely given over to the bottle. The old man had named the mother of the girls as his heir under the condition that she distribute his entire fortune to the three girls equally, but in the following manner: first, 'Let them not possess nor enjoy what they have been given', and second, 'As soon as they have given up the property which they receive, let them bestow a hundred thousand sesterces on their mother.' Gossip filled the city of Athens, and the mother diligently consulted expert lawyers but none could explain to her how the daughters could not possess what was given to them or how they might not enjoy its benefits; likewise they could not say how girls who had nothing would be able to pay such a sum of money to their mother. A great deal of time had been lost in delaying, and still the meaning of the will could not be grasped, so the mother put the law aside and appealed to common sense. To the lascivious daughter, she gave the

women's clothes and baubles, along with the silver ewers and beardless eunuchs; the spinster received the fields and the flocks, the country estate and farmhands, along with the cattle and draught animals and farming tools; and for the hard-drinking daughter there was a cellar filled with casks of vintage wine, an elegant house, and pleasant little gardens. The mother was about to give the designated goods to each daughter with the public's general approval (since they were all well acquainted with the daughters' proclivities), when Aesop suddenly appeared in the midst of the crowd and said, 'If only the father were aware of what is happening, he would be turning in his grave at the inability of the Athenians to understand his will!' When asked to explain himself, Aesop corrected the mistake that they had all made and told them, 'Assign the house with its furnishings and lovely gardens and the aged wine to the spinster who lives in the countryside; give the dress and the pearls and the attendants and so on to the ugly creature who boozes her days away; and then give the fields and the country estate with the sheep and the shepherds to the slut. None of them will be able to stand having things which are alien to their way of life. The ugly daughter will sell all the finery to supply herself with wine; the slut will get rid of the fields so that she can supply herself with fripperies; and the one who loves the flocks and is devoted to spinning will not hesitate to sell the opulent estate. In this way no daughter will possess what has been given to her, and each of them will bestow on their mother the specified sum from the proceeds of the sale.'

The cunning of a single man thus solved a problem that had eluded many others in their ignorance.

NOTE: For another example of Aesop's expertise in posing and solving riddles, see Fable 537. The Roman sestertius was the coinage in which the largest sums were reckoned and the amount of money involved here is not unusual for an aristocratic Roman family. At roughly the time that Phaedrus was writing, a decree was passed that someone who wanted to put on a gladiatorial show had to have a net worth of 400,000 sesterces (Tacitus, *Annals* 4.63).

INSULTS

Fable 550 (Phaedrus 1.7 = Perry 27)

The Fox and the Mask

A fox happened to find a mask used for performing tragedies and, after turning it this way and that several times, she remarked, 'So full of beauty, so lacking in brains!'

This is a saying for people to whom Fortune has granted honour and glory, while depriving them of common sense.

NOTE: In the medieval Latin tradition, this story is told of a wolf, not a fox.

Fable 551 (Phaedrus 3.4 = Perry 496)

The Monkey and the Butcher

A man noticed a monkey hanging in the butcher's shop amidst the other merchandise and foods for sale, and he asked what the monkey tasted like. 'Well,' joked the butcher, 'its taste is a perfect match for its face!'

I think the butcher's remark is more funny than true; I have often met with beautiful people who actually turned out to be complete scoundrels, while having known some ugly people who were truly excellent individuals.

Fable 552 (Chambry 115* = Perry 96)

The Snake and the Thorn Bush

There was a grapevine next to a river, and a thorn bush had been planted as a fence around the vine. When the river rose, the thorn bush was swept away by the water, and a snake who had entwined himself in the thorns was also carried away. When someone saw the snake riding on the thorn bush, he said, 'A wicked ship, and worthy of its sailor!'

The story shows that a wicked person deservedly comes to a bad end by keeping company with other wicked people.

> NOTE: In other versions of this story (included in Chambry's first edition of the Greek fables), it is a fox who makes fun of the thorn bush and the snake.

Fable 553 (Babrius 133 = Perry 360)

The Donkey and the Thorns

A donkey was eating the spiny leaves of a thorn bush when a fox happened to see him. The fox crept up and said, ‘Hey you, how can you chew and swallow such tough food with your flabby, flapping tongue?’

> NOTE: This odd little joke may have been prompted by the Latin proverb *similes habent labra latucas*, ‘the lips have lettuce to match’, which seems to have been associated with the motif of donkeys eating thistles (see Jerome, *Epistles* 7.5). Compare the English saying, ‘A thistle is a fat salad for an ass’s mouth’ (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*).

Fable 554 (Ademar 8 = Perry 559)

The Snail and the Mirror

A snail found a mirror, and when she saw how brightly he shone, she fell in love with him. She quickly climbed up onto the mirror’s round surface and began to lick him. The snail clearly was no good for the mirror and only besmirched his lustrous radiance with filth and slime. A monkey then found the mirror after it had been dirtied by the snail, and remarked, ‘That’s what happens when you let someone like that walk all over you!’

For women who marry worthless fools.

Fable 555 (Phaedrus 3.19 = Perry 510)

Aesop and His Lamp

Once when Aesop happened to be the only slave in his master's household, he was ordered to prepare dinner earlier than usual. He thus had to visit a few houses looking for fire, until at last he found a place where he could light his lamp. Since his search had taken him out of his way along a winding path, he decided to shorten his journey on the way back and go straight through the forum. There amidst the crowds a talkative fellow shouted at him, 'Aesop, what are you doing with a lamp in the middle of the day?' 'I'm just looking to see if I can find a real man', said Aesop, as he quickly made his way back home. If that public nuisance had bothered to give this any thought, he would immediately have understood that as far as old Aesop was concerned, he was not a man at all, but only a pest who was bothering someone who had better things to do.

> NOTE: This appears to be a variation on the famous anecdote of Diogenes the Cynic looking for an honest man, as reported in Diogenes Laertius, *Life of Diogenes* 41. The same story is attributed to an anonymous 'Christian ascetic' in Rumi, *Mathnawi* 5.2887 ff.

Fable 556 (Phaedrus *App*. 9 = Perry 537)

Aesop and the Writer

A man had read to Aesop selections from a badly written work in which he stupidly boasted at length about what a great writer he

was. The man wanted to know what Aesop thought, so the writer said to him, ‘Surely you do not think I have too high an opinion of myself? My confidence in my own genius is not misplaced, is it?’ ‘Not at all’, said Aesop, who was utterly exhausted by the writer’s wretched book. ‘I think it is a very good idea for you to praise yourself, given that no one else is ever likely to do so!’

Fable 557 (Chambry 19 = Perry 8)

Aesop and the Shipbuilders

Aesop the storyteller had nothing in particular to do, so he strolled into the workshop of some shipbuilders. The workers began to taunt Aesop, provoking him to speak, so Aesop replied with this old story. ‘Once upon a time,’ said Aesop, ‘there was only Chaos and Water. God then wanted to make a new element emerge, Gaia, the Earth. So he ordered the Earth to swallow the sea in three gulps. Earth did as she was ordered: the first gulp caused the mountains to appear, and the second gulp caused the plains to be revealed. And if she decides to take a third gulp,’ said Aesop, ‘that will be the end of all you shipbuilders and your entire profession!’

This story shows that people are asking for trouble if they make fun of someone who is better than they are.

NOTE: This fable is also found in Aristotle, *Meteorologica* 2.3, with two notable differences: in Aristotle, Aesop tells the story in anger to a ferryman, not shipbuilders, and it is not Earth but Charybdis,

the monstrous whirlpool of Greek mythology, who drinks the waters.

JOKES

Fable 558 (Chambry 88 = Perry 246)

The Woman and Her Drunken Husband

There was a woman whose husband was always drunk, so she came up with a plan to cure him of his drinking problem. After he had passed out one night and was sleeping the sleep of the dead, she picked him up and carried him on her shoulders to the common cemetery. Then she put him down on the ground and left him there. She waited until he had time to sober up, then she went and knocked at the entrance to the cemetery. Her husband shouted, 'Who's there?' She answered, 'I am the one who brings food to the dead.' Her husband shouted back, 'I don't want anything to eat, but bring me something to drink, my good man! It pains me to hear you speaking of food but saying nothing about a drink!' The woman then beat her breast and exclaimed, 'Woe is me! My ingenuity has not accomplished anything! O my husband, you have not simply failed to learn your lesson: you are actually even worse than before. Your problem has turned out to be permanent!'

This fable shows that people should not regularly engage in bad behaviour because at a certain point the habit will impose itself permanently, even if they do not want that to happen.

Fable 559 (Chambry 10 = Perry 5)

The Man, the Pig, and the Miracle

In Athens, there was a man who had taken out a loan and was now being asked by the creditor to pay back the money. At first he asked the creditor to give him an extension, since he said he couldn't manage to find the cash. But he could not get the creditor to agree, so he brought the only pig that he had, a sow, and put it up for sale as the creditor was looking on. A buyer approached and asked if the sow was a good breeder. The man replied that she was indeed; in fact, her litters were miraculous: for the Mysteries she gave birth only to female piglets, while for the Panathenaea Festival she gave birth only to males. When the buyer was dumbfounded by this story, the creditor added, 'That's nothing! For the Festival of Dionysus, she gives birth to baby goats.'

This story shows that when it serves their purposes, people commonly do not hesitate to swear to the most incredible fabrications.

NOTE: At the annual Eleusinian Mysteries celebrated in honour of Demeter, only female piglets were acceptable for sacrifice, while male piglets were sacrificed at the Panathenaea, the great Athenian festival that was celebrated once every four years. The god Dionysus did not accept pigs in sacrifice, but preferred goats. The goddess Aphrodite also disdained pigs; see Fable 197.

Fable 560 (Babrius 8 = Perry 287)

The Arab and His Camel

An Arab loaded up his camel and then asked whether he preferred to take the uphill path or the downhill path. With a burst of inspiration, the camel replied, ‘So the level road is blocked, is it?’

Fable 561 (Chambry 2 = Perry 99)

The Man and the Statue of Hermes

A man fashioned a Hermes out of wood and carried it to the market to put it up for sale but no customers approached him. In order to attract some buyers the man began to shout that he was selling a wish-fulfilling god who brought profit to its owner. ‘Hey you,’ someone said, ‘why are you putting such a thing up for sale, instead of enjoying its benefits yourself?’ The man answered, ‘I am in need of some immediate benefits, but this god happens to take his time when distributing profits!’

This fable suits a man who is so greedy for gain that he doesn’t even have respect for the gods.

Fable 562 (Chambry 108* = Perry 88)

Hermes and the Statues

Hermes wanted to know how much people valued him, so he assumed a human form and went into a sculptor’s workshop. He saw there a statue of Zeus and he asked how much it cost. The man said that it cost a drachma. Hermes smiled, and asked how much the statue of Hera would be. The man named a still higher price. When

Hermes saw a statue of himself, he expected that he would be reckoned at an even higher price, since he delivered the messages of the gods and brought profit to mankind. But when he asked how much the statue of Hermes would cost, the sculptor replied, ‘If you buy those other two, I’ll throw this one in for free!’

This fable can be used for a conceited man who is not esteemed in any way by other people.

NOTE: Hera is the Greek equivalent of Juno, the wife of Zeus and queen of the gods.

Fable 563 (Babrius 30 = Perry 307)

Hermes, the Sculptor, and His Dream

A sculptor was selling a white marble statue of Hermes which two men wanted to buy: one of them, whose son had just died, wanted it for the tombstone, while the other was a craftsman who wanted to consecrate the statue to the god himself. It was getting late, and the sculptor had not yet sold the statue. He agreed that he would show the statue again to the men when they came back the next morning. In his sleep, the sculptor saw Hermes himself standing at the Gate of Dreams. The god spoke to him and said, ‘Well, my fate hangs in the balance: it is up to you whether I will become a dead man or a god!’

BATHROOM HUMOUR

Fable 564 (Babrius 48 = Perry 308)

Hermes and the Dog

There was a four-cornered statue of Hermes by the side of the road, with a heap of stones piled at its base. A dog approached the statue and said to it, ‘To begin with, Hermes, I salute you! And now I am going to anoint you, since I cannot let a god go by without anointing him, much less a god of the athletes.’ Hermes said to the dog, ‘If you can just leave the oil alone and not pee on me, I shall be grateful enough; you do not need to honour me in any other way!’

NOTE: The ‘four-cornered statue’ was a herm, a rectangular or square pillar decorated with the head of Hermes on top and with male genitalia below which was supposed to bring fertility and good luck. Herms could be found at crossroads and also in the gymnasia, where the athletes trained.

Fable 565 (Babrius 40 = Perry 321)

The Camel in the River

As the humpbacked camel was crossing a swift-flowing river, she relieved herself. Then, when she saw her excrement floating out in front of her, the camel remarked, ‘Oh, this is a bad business indeed: the thing that should have stayed behind has now moved up to the front!’

NOTE: An epimythium probably added by a later editor reads: ‘Someone could tell this Aesop’s fable about a city where it is not

the first-class citizens who rule, but people who are of the lowest order.'

Fable 566 (Odo 44 = Perry 608)

The Dog and the Reeds

Against evil associates and the like.

There was a dog who wanted to do his business right on top of a clump of bulrushes but one of the reeds poked the dog's behind. The dog backed off and began to bark at the reeds. The reed said, 'I would rather have you bark at me from a distance than have you dirty me up close!'

Fable 567 (*Life of Aesop* 67 = Perry 380)

The King's Son and His Guts

Xanthus, Aesop's master, said to him, 'Can you tell me why we sometimes look at our own shit after we go to the bathroom?' Aesop replied, 'A long time ago the son of a king indulged in all kinds of luxurious foods. As a result, he spent a lot of time in the bathroom. And once he spent such a long time sitting there that he forgot what he was doing and crapped his own guts out. Ever since, anyone taking a crap bends over to make sure he hasn't done the same thing. But you don't have to worry about that, since you don't have any guts to begin with!'

NOTE: This fable depends on a distinctly Greek understanding of human anatomy: the ‘guts’ are actually the seat of intelligence (English ‘brains’) rather than a sign of courage. By saying that his master has no ‘guts’, Aesop means that his master is an idiot, not that he is a coward.

Fable 568 (Chambry 262 = Perry 185)

Zeus and the Donkeys

The donkeys were tired of being laden with burdens and labouring all the days of their lives, so they sent ambassadors to Zeus, asking him to release them from their toil. Zeus, wanting to show them that they had asked for something impossible, said that their suffering would come to an end on the day when they pissed a river. The donkeys took him seriously, and to this day whenever donkeys see where another donkey has pissed, they come to a halt and piss in the same place.

The fable shows that a person cannot escape his allotted fate.

Fable 569 (Phaedrus 4.19 = Perry 517)

Jupiter and the Dogs

Once upon a time, the dogs sent ambassadors to Jupiter to ask him to improve the conditions of their life and to save them from being mistreated by people who fed them nothing but bread that was full of bran, compelling them to satisfy their hunger with unspeakable filth. The ambassadors set out on their mission but were hardly swift

of foot: instead they sniffed for food in heaps of manure and did not even come when called. With considerable difficulty Mercury found them at last and dragged them into heaven. The dogs were wild with excitement, but when they glimpsed the face of mighty Jupiter, they were stricken with fear and covered the floors of the palace with shit. They were chased out with clubs and went outside, but Jupiter would not let them depart. Meanwhile, the dogs back home were surprised when their ambassadors did not return. After a while they concluded that the mission must have ended in an embarrassing failure, so the dogs ordered that other ambassadors be appointed in their place. Eventually they learned the full story of their predecessors' shitty performance, and they were afraid that something similar might happen once again, so this time they stuffed the dogs' behinds full of perfume. The ambassadors received their orders and were sent on their journey; as soon as they requested an audience in heaven, it was granted. The supreme father of the gods took his seat, and as he rattled his thunderbolt, the universe quaked. The dogs were startled by the sudden upheaval and promptly pooped, their shit now mixed with perfume. The gods all demanded that the dogs pay for this outrage so Jupiter issued the following decree before punishing the dogs: 'A king cannot refuse ambassadors leave to depart, and it is hard to decide on a penalty that suits their behaviour, but their insolent prank cannot go unrewarded: accordingly, I will not prevent their departure, but I condemn them to a starvation diet, so that they will be able to keep control of their bowels. Meanwhile, those dogs who twice appointed

such incontinent incompetents as their ambassadors will forever be humiliated by mankind.' As a result, dogs of this later age are still on the look-out for their ambassadors, so whenever a strange dog crosses their path, they take a whiff of his behind.

JOKES ABOUT WOMEN

Fable 570 (Chambry 49* = Perry 95)

The Man and His Ill-Tempered Wife

A man had a wife who was hostile towards all the members of their household. He wondered if she treated the members of her father's household the same way, so he found a plausible excuse to send her away to her father's house. When she returned a few days later, he asked her how she had been received. His wife replied, 'The cowherds and the shepherds gave me dirty looks!' The husband then remarked, 'My wife, if you have hostile relations with those men who drive their flocks out at dawn and don't come back until late in the evening, then what kind of treatment can you expect from people who must spend the entire day in your company?'

The fable shows that great things can be detected in small things, and invisible things can be seen in what it is visible.

Fable 571 (Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1401 ff. = Perry 423)

Aesop and the Bitch

It was evening, and Aesop was on his way home from a dinner when a drunken bitch made so bold as to start barking at him. Aesop then said to her, ‘Bitch, bitch, if you had any intelligence at all, you would trade in that wicked tongue of yours and buy some wheat instead!’

NOTE: As van Dijk notes (17F2), this fable depends on the negative reputation of bread-sellers in Greek culture, who were something like the proverbial fishwife in English.

Fable 572 (Phaedrus 3.1 = Perry 493)

The Old Woman and the Wine Jar

An old woman saw a wine jar that had been drained empty, but the lees of the exquisite wine still sent forth a pleasant odour from the noble vessel. The woman greedily imbibed the smell, deeply inhaling through both nostrils, and said, ‘Oh sweet spirits, I do declare, how excellent you must once have been to have left behind such fine remains!’

People who know me will be able to say what this fable is about.

NOTE: Phaedrus is playing with the comic stereotype of the drunken old woman, who was a stock figure of both Greek and Roman comedy (e.g. Plautus, *Cistellaria* 149: ‘This old woman is both a big talker and a big drinker’).

Fable 573 (Phaedrus *App*. 11 = Perry 539)

Venus and the Hen

When Juno boasted of her chastity, Venus didn't want to quarrel with her so she did not dispute what Juno said, but in order to show that no other woman was as chaste as Juno she reportedly asked some questions of a hen. 'So,' Venus said to the hen, 'could you please tell me how much food it would take to satisfy you?' The hen answered, 'Whatever you give me will be enough, as long as you let me use my feet to scratch for something more.' 'What about a peck of wheat: would that be enough to keep you from scratching?' 'Oh my, that is more than enough food, of course, but please let me go on scratching.' Venus asked, 'Then what do you want to completely give up scratching?' At that point the hen finally confessed her natural-born weakness and said, 'Even if I had access to a whole barn full of grain, I would still just keep on scratching.' Juno is said to have laughed at Venus' joke, because by means of that hen the goddess had made an indictment of women in general.

Fable 574 (Babrius 116 = Perry 350)

The Man, His Wife, and the Boy Outside

There was a boy singing sweet serenades in the middle of the night. A woman heard him and got up from bed to peep out of the window at him. When she saw the boy, who looked very beautiful in the shining moonlight, she left her husband asleep and went downstairs and out the door. She then met the boy in the street and satisfied herself completely. All of a sudden her husband woke up and

wanted to find out where his wife had gone. Not finding her inside the house, he didn't just stand there gaping but instead followed her outside and said, 'It's all right. Go ahead and persuade the boy to sleep in our house.' So he took the boy and brought him inside. He didn't have any trouble after that, and joined in whenever the two of them wanted to do something.

That's the story, and the message of the fable is that it is a bad thing to just stand there gaping like a fool when you can manage to enjoy yourself.

Fable 575 (*Life of Aesop* 131 = Perry 386)

The Mother and Her Foolish Daughter

A woman had a daughter who was a fool. She implored all the gods to put some sense into her, and the girl often heard her mother praying in this way. Then one day they went to their country farm. The girl left her mother and wandered into the fields. When she saw a man forcing himself on a donkey, she asked, 'What are you doing?' The man said, 'I'm putting some sense into her.' The foolish girl remembered her mother's prayers and said, 'Put some sense into me too!' The man refused to screw her because, he said, 'There is nothing more ungrateful than a woman.' The girl said, 'Don't worry on that account, sir! My mother will be very grateful to you and will pay you whatever you want, since she is always praying for me to get some sense.' So the man deflowered her. The girl was overjoyed and ran to tell her mother the good news. 'Mother, mother,' she

said, ‘I’ve got some sense now!’ The mother exclaimed, ‘The gods have answered my prayers!’ The daughter replied, ‘Indeed they have, mother!’ The mother then asked, ‘And how did you get some sense, my child?’ The foolish girl explained, ‘It was a long, red, sinewy thing running in and out that put some sense into me.’ When the mother heard her daughter’s explanation, she said, ‘My child, you have lost what sense you had to begin with!’

Fable 576 (Syntipas 54 = Perry 410)

The Man and the Old Woman

A young man was walking along on a blazing hot day when he met an old woman who was going the same way. Seeing that she was dreadfully exhausted from the heat of the day and the demands of the journey, he felt sorry for her weakness and when the woman simply didn’t have the strength to go any further, he picked her up off the ground and carried her on his shoulders. While he was carrying her this way, the young man was so strongly aroused by shameful thoughts that he had an erection. Spurred by wanton lust and hot desire, he immediately put the old woman down on the ground and had sex with her. Being simple-minded, the woman asked him, ‘What are you doing to me?’ He answered, ‘You are too heavy to carry, so I’ve decided to carve off some of your flesh.’ The man satisfied himself and then picked the woman up off the ground again and set her on his shoulders. After he had gone some way down the road, the old woman said to him, ‘If I am still too heavy a

burden for you, you can put me down again and carve off some more of me!'

This fable shows that some people, when satisfying their own personal desires, pretend as if the thing was done without their knowledge, giving the impression that it is not actually a matter of desire, but rather some practical necessity.

Fable 577 (Phaedrus *App*. 15 = Perry 543)

The Widow and Her Lover

A woman had lost her beloved husband of many years and had laid his body in the ground. It was impossible to tear her away from his grave, and she filled her days with weeping. Everyone repeated glowingly that this woman was an example of a truly faithful wife. Meanwhile, some men who had pillaged the temple of Jupiter were condemned to death for their crime against the god. After they had been crucified, soldiers were stationed by the crosses so that the families of the executed criminals could not recover their bodies. This all took place next to the tomb where the woman had secluded herself. One of the guards happened to be thirsty and asked the woman's maidservant to bring him some water in the middle of the night. As it happened, the maid had been helping her mistress prepare for bed, as the widow had maintained her vigil long into the night and was still sitting up by the light of the lamp. The door was open just a crack and when the soldier peeped inside, he saw a woman of exceptional beauty. He was immediately enthralled and

inflamed with lust, and an irresistible desire began gradually to well up inside him. His crafty ingenuity found a thousand reasons to see the widow again and again. Acquiescing to this regular daily contact, the widow slowly but surely became more and more inclined towards her guest, and soon an even closer bond united her heart to his. While the guard was spending his nights in the widow's embrace, one of the corpses was spirited away from the cross. The soldier was upset and told the woman what had happened. That exemplary woman said, 'Don't worry!' and with these words, she handed over her husband's corpse to be nailed to the cross, so that the soldier would not be punished for dereliction of duty.

That is how debauchery besieges a bastion of fair repute.

NOTE: This fable is best known as the 'Widow of Ephesus' from the version found in Petronius, *Satyricon* 111.

Fable 578 (*Life of Aesop* 129 = Perry 388)

The Ploughman and the Widow

A woman had buried her husband and was sitting beside his tomb, weeping in uncontrollable grief. A man who was ploughing nearby saw the woman and wanted to make love to her. He left his oxen yoked to the plough and approached the woman, pretending to weep. She stopped crying and asked him, 'Why are you weeping?' The man answered, 'I have buried my wife, a wise and good woman. When I weep, I lighten my grief.' The woman said, 'I too have lost

my husband, and he also was a very good man. When I weep, I lighten the burden of my grief, just as you do.' The man then said to her, 'If we have both suffered the same fate and misfortune, why don't we get to know each other better? I will love you as I loved her, and you will love me as you loved your husband.' By talking in this way, he managed to win the woman over. When they were busy making love, someone unyoked the man's oxen and drove them away. When the man realized what had happened and could not find his oxen anywhere, he began to wail as if his very heart were breaking. The woman asked, 'Why are you crying?' The man said, 'Woman, now I really have a reason to weep!'

JOKES ABOUT BALD MEN

Fable 579 (Avianus 10 = Perry 375)

The Bald Horseman

There was a bald horseman who used to attach a wig to his head, wearing other people's hair on his own bald pate. One day he came to Mars Field, making a great show of himself in his splendid armour. He then began to turn his horse in manoeuvres, easily guiding him with the bridle. At that very moment, the blasts of the North Wind blew against him and made his head a source of laughter for all of the onlookers: the wig was torn aside, revealing the gleam of his bald head, which was an entirely different colour from the hair that had been there before. But the fellow was quick-witted, and when he saw that he was being laughed at by thousands

of people, he ingeniously deflected this public derision by making a joke. ‘It’s no surprise that the wig that was put there ran away,’ he said, ‘since my natural-born hair already deserted me once before!’

NOTE: Military training and exercises took place in ‘Mars Field’ (*Campus Martius*) in Rome, where there was an ancient temple dedicated to Mars, the god of war.

Fable 580 (Chambry 97 = Perry 248)

Diogenes and the Bald Man

A bald man insulted Diogenes the Cynic and Diogenes replied, ‘Far be it from me to make insults! But I do want to compliment your hair for having abandoned such a worthless head.’

NOTE: For another anecdote about Diogenes the Cynic, see Fable 85.

Fable 581 (Phaedrus 5.6 = Perry 528)

The Bald Men and the Comb

A bald man happened to find a comb lying in the street. Another man who also had no hair on his head accosted him and said, ‘Hey, you must share whatever you’ve found!’ The first man showed him the loot and said, ‘The will of the gods is on our side, but fate must have a grudge against us: as the saying goes, we’ve found lumps of coal, not gold!’

This complaint suits a man whose high hopes have played him false.

Fable 582 (Phaedrus 5.3 = Perry 525)

The Bald Man and the Fly

A bald man was bitten on the head by a fly, and when he tried to swat the fly he gave himself a serious slap on the head. Then the fly laughed at the man and said, 'You wanted to avenge the sting of a tiny little insect by committing murder: what are you going to do to yourself now that you have added insult to your injury?' The man replied, 'I can easily forgive myself since I know that I did not try to hurt myself on purpose. As for you, you worthless creature, spawn of a loathsome race of insects who delight in drinking human blood, I would be glad to get rid of you even if it required an even greater inconvenience to myself!'

This shows that a person who commits an accidental crime should be pardoned, while the person who injures someone else on purpose should, in my opinion, be punished as fully as possible.

Fable 583 (Ademar 24 = Perry 560)

The Bald Man and the Gardener

A bald man asked his neighbour, a gardener, to give him some of his pumpkins. The gardener laughed at him and said, 'Go away, baldy, go away! I'm not giving any of my pumpkins to riffraff like you. Damn you and your baldness, in winter and summer—I hope flies and bugs land all over your bald head and bite you and drink your blood and poop on your head!' The bald man got angry and drew his sword. He seized the gardener by the hair, intending to kill him,

but the gardener grabbed one of his pumpkins and hit the bald man on the head. In the end, the bald man was too strong for him and he cut off the gardener's head.

For people who do not offer to share their goods when asked, and instead offer only rude words and rebukes.

> NOTE: This odd little story seems to be based at least in part on the Latin proverbial expression 'balder than a pumpkin' (Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* 5.9).

Fable 584 (Phaedrus 2.2 = Perry 31)

The Bald Man and His Two Mistresses

There are all kinds of stories showing us how women habitually strip a man of his possessions, regardless of whether they are in love with him or he with them.

There was a woman who had a middle-aged man as her lover, and although she was no spring chicken herself, she concealed her age with exquisite grace. There was also a beautiful young girl who had caught the man's fancy. Both women wanted to seem a suitable partner for him, so they began plucking out his hair in turn. The man imagined that his looks were being improved by their attentions but in the end he went bald, since the young girl plucked out every one of his gray hairs, while the older woman plucked out all the black ones.

NOTE: See also the 1st-century BCE historian Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 33.7. L'Estrange comments: "Tis a much harder Thing to please two Wives, than two Masters; and he's a bold Man that offers at it.'

JOKES ABOUT DOCTORS

Fable 585 (Chambry 249* = Perry 170)

The Patient and His Symptoms

The doctor asked his patient, 'How are you feeling?' The patient said, 'Woe is me! I'm shivering all over, which has me very worried.' The doctor assured the patient that this was actually a good sign. The next time the doctor asked the patient how he was doing, the man replied, 'I feel awful: I'm suffering from a high fever which has me confined to bed.' Again the doctor said that this was a positive symptom. Finally a member of the man's family asked, 'How are you doing, my dear brother? I hope you get well soon!' The man replied, 'I'm dying of positive symptoms!'

The fable shows when people want to console someone who is suffering, they usually encourage him by saying things that are not true.

Fable 586 (Chambry 134* = Perry 114)

The Doctor at the Funeral

As a doctor was following the funeral cortège of one of his relatives, he remarked to the mourners in the procession that the man would

not have died if he had stopped drinking wine and used an enema. Someone in the crowd then said to the doctor, ‘Hey! This is hardly the time to offer such advice, when it can’t do him any good. You should have given him the advice when he still could have used it!’

The fable shows that friends should offer their help when there is need of it, and not play the wise man after the fact.

NOTE: Compare the Latin joke in Propertius, *Elegies* 2.14: ‘medicine is now being administered to the ashes’ (i.e. after the cremation of the body). Compare also the English proverb, ‘after death, the doctor’ (e.g., Shakespeare, *Henry VIII* 3.2.41: ‘he brings his physic after the patient’s death’).

Fable 587 (Babrius 75 = Perry 317)

The Doctor and His Dead Patient

There was once a doctor who knew nothing about medicine. So when everyone was telling a certain sick man, ‘Don’t give up, you will get well; your illness is the sort that lasts for a while, but then you will feel better’, this doctor marched in and declared, ‘I’m not going to play games with you or tell you lies: you need to take care of all your affairs because you are going to die. You cannot expect to live past tomorrow.’ Having said this, the doctor did not even bother to come back again. After a while the patient recovered from his illness and ventured out of doors, although he was still quite pale and not yet steady on his feet. When the doctor ran into the

patient, he greeted him, and asked him how all the people down in Hades were doing. The patient said, ‘They are taking it easy, drinking the waters of Lethe. But Persephone and the mighty god Pluto were just now threatening terrible things against all the doctors, since they keep the sick people from dying. Every single doctor was denounced, and they were ready to put you at the top of the list. This scared me, so I immediately stepped forward and grasped their royal sceptres as I solemnly swore that since you are not really a doctor at all, the accusation was ridiculous!’

NOTE: In Greek mythology, Hades is the land of the dead, on the other side of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness; Pluto is the king of Hades and Persephone is queen.

Fable 588 (Phaedrus 1.14 = Perry 475)

The Cobbler and the King

An untalented cobbler had gone completely broke, so he set up shop as a doctor in a town where no one knew him. By marketing an ‘antidote’ with a fictitious name and making all sorts of extravagant claims, the cobbler gained a wide reputation. When the king of the city had grave need of a doctor, he decided to put this man to the test: he called for a goblet, filled it with water, and pretended to mix the doctor’s antidote together with a fatal poison. The king then ordered the doctor to drink the mixture, offering him a reward if he would do so. The prospect of death scared the cobbler into confessing that he had no knowledge of medicine whatsoever and

that he had in fact acquired his fame only thanks to universal gullibility. The king then assembled the people and said to them, ‘Are you completely out of your minds? You willingly trusted this man in matters of life and death when he could not even be trusted in matters of boots and shoes!’

I would say this story is well suited to situations in which swindlers take advantage of other people’s foolishness.

> NOTE: The punch-line in Latin depends on the dual meaning of *caput*, both ‘head’ but also ‘life’: the king makes fun of the people for having trusted their heads (lives) to the very man to whom they would not even trust their feet. Cobblers were proverbially incapable of taking up other professions: ‘don’t let the cobbler make pronouncements on anything above the sole’ (Valerius Maximus 8.12.3; cf. the English proverb, ‘let the cobbler stick to his last’).

Fable 589 (Chambry 87* = Perry 57)

The Old Woman and Her Doctor

An old woman suffering from an eye ailment summoned a doctor who charged a certain fee. She told him that if he cured her, she would pay him the specified fee, but if he didn’t cure her, she wouldn’t pay him anything. The doctor began the cure, visiting the woman every day. He would smear an ointment on her eyes, and while the ointment prevented her from seeing, he would take some

object from her house and carry it away. He did the same thing day after day. The woman saw that her property was being diminished with each passing day and by the time she was cured, all her household goods were gone. The doctor asked her for the agreed-upon fee, since she was now able to see clearly, and he summoned witnesses to their agreement. The woman protested, 'I can't see a thing! Even when my eyes were ailing, I was able to see the many things which I had in my home. Now, when you claim I am cured, I can't see any of them!'

The fable shows that by their own actions, wicked people can unwittingly serve as witnesses against themselves in a court of law.

ROMAN ANECDOTES

Fable 590 (Phaedrus *App*. 10 = Perry 538)

Pompey and His Soldier

One of Pompey's soldiers was a big, strapping fellow, but he spoke with a falsetto and swung his hips like a lady, which made everyone think he was a fairy. One night he laid an ambush for Pompey's baggage cart, and by leading the mules astray he made off with a great deal of silver and gold and clothing. The story of what the soldier had done quickly spread throughout the camp. Charges were brought and the man was taken off to headquarters where General Pompey asked him, 'What do you have to say for yourself? Were you in fact the man who robbed me, comrade?' The soldier immediately spit into his left hand and then shook the spittle off his

fingers as he pronounced the following oath: ‘Commander, may my eyeballs dribble out of their sockets just like this spittle if I so much as saw or touched anything that belongs to you.’ Pompey, being an unsuspecting sort of person, simply could not believe that this soldier would have had the courage to commit such a crime, and he ordered him to be taken away as a disgrace to the regiment. A short time later, an enemy soldier challenged one of our Roman soldiers to a fight, absolutely confident that he would win. All the Roman soldiers feared for their lives, and the chief officers were muttering about what to do. Then the soldier who looked like a fairy but who had the strength of Mars himself, approached one of the officers seated on the raised platform and said in his quavering voice, ‘May I?’ Pompey was outraged at this appalling state of affairs and ordered the man to be thrown out, but one of Pompey’s old friends spoke to him and said, ‘I for one think it is better to put this man to the test, since he is entirely dispensable. That would be better than risking a powerful warrior, whose unfortunate loss would be used as proof of your recklessness.’ Pompey agreed and allowed the soldier to accept the challenge. As the army watched in amazement, he cut his opponent’s head off faster than you can say ‘thwack’. Pompey then said to him, ‘Soldier, I gladly award you the victor’s crown, since you have avenged the honour of the Roman forces—but may my eyeballs dribble out of their sockets’ (and Pompey also repeated the filthy gesture which the soldier had used when he had sworn his oath) ‘if you are not the man who stole my baggage cart the other night!’

NOTE: There is a promythium appended to the fable in Perotti's Appendix: 'The fable shows how difficult it is to know a person.' Pompey ('Pompey the Great') was a Roman politician and general who was defeated and killed in 48 BCE.

Fable 591 (Phaedrus 5.7 = Perry 529)

'*The Prince*'

When a fatuous person gets carried away by the slightest breeze of fame and acquires an overly high estimation of his own worth, his ridiculous vanity soon makes him a laughing-stock.

There was a flute-player named Prince who was more or less well-known, since he provided the musical accompaniment for Bathyllus the dancer. At one of their shows, I don't remember precisely which one, the stage machinery unexpectedly swung around and Prince tumbled down onto the stage. He broke his left leg and fell flat on his face (he must have been playing in the key of B-flat). They picked him up and carted him off the stage as he moaned and groaned. It took him several months to recover. Given that theatre-goers are such a sentimental and devoted lot, they began to miss him; after all, his flute-playing had always roused the dancers to greater heights. A prominent citizen was about to stage a public performance, and now that Prince was again able to walk using a cane, the man persuaded him with invitations (and a fee) to at least put in an appearance on the day of the show. As soon as Prince arrived, rumours of the flute-player's return buzzed throughout the

theatre: while some swore he was dead, others claimed that he was about to show himself to the entire audience in just a moment. Then the curtains parted and there was a thunderous clang announcing the arrival of the gods who made their usual speech, and then the chorus started in with a song that Prince did not recognize, since he had been away from the theatre for several months. The song's refrain went like this: 'Rejoice, O Rome: you are safe now that the prince is well!' The audience stood up to applaud. The flute-player blew kisses to them, thinking that his fans were congratulating him on his recovery. The people in the front row seats realized the man's foolish mistake and with a roar of laughter they demanded an encore. The song was repeated, and our hero prostrated himself at full-length on the stage. The front rows continued their mock applause, while the crowd thought Prince was simply bowing in honour of the chorus. Eventually, however, the entire audience realized his mistake and at that point the 'Prince', dressed in a white gown, his leg wrapped in a white bandage—he even had white shoes on his feet!—was tossed head-first off the stage. His exit met with universal approval, since he had appropriated for himself the honours being paid to the prince of Rome, the divine Caesar himself.

NOTE: The performer is named 'Prince' (Latin *princeps*), which was an honorific title bestowed on the Caesars. The name Bathyllus suggests that this anecdote belongs to the time of Caesar Augustus (d. 14 CE), as Bathyllus was a favourite performer of Augustus'

good friend Maecenas. The ‘people in the front row seats’ are the members of Rome’s equestrian order of citizenry, who had seats set aside for their use in the theatre. The reference to ‘B-flat’ replaces an untranslatable play on words in the Latin: the musician breaks his left ‘tibia’, a word which can also refer to one of the pipes in a pan-pipe.

Fable 592 (Phaedrus 5.5 = Perry 527)

The Clown, the Farmer, and the Pig

In their groundless favouritism, people often make mistakes; they stand behind a judgement made in error until the actual fact of the matter later compels them to regret their choice.

There was a certain wealthy man, a prominent citizen, who was about to sponsor a public entertainment. He invited anyone who had some novelty to perform, promising to pay them a fee. Professional performers came to compete for public acclaim, and among them was a clown who was well known for his sophisticated sense of humour. He said that he had a type of spectacle that had never been performed in any theatre before. The rumour spread throughout the city, sparking the public’s interest. Theatre seats that had recently been left empty were now not enough for the gathering crowd. After the clown came out by himself on the stage, with no equipment and no assistants, a hush of anticipation silenced the spectators. Then the clown suddenly lowered his head towards his chest and imitated the sound of a little pig. The sound was so true to

life that the audience maintained that there must be a real little pig concealed under his cloak and they demanded that it be shaken out. But when the cloak was shaken out, it proved to be empty, so they lavished the clown with praise and he left the stage to resounding applause. A country bumpkin saw what had happened and said, ‘By gosh, I can do better than that!’ He immediately promised that he would do the same thing, only better, the following day. The crowd grew still larger and favouritism had already swayed their perception; you could tell that they had not come to watch the performance so much as to make fun of it. The two men came out onto the stage. The clown squealed as he had done the day before, provoking the audience’s applause and shouts of approval. Now it was the turn of the country bumpkin, who pretended to conceal a little pig beneath his clothes—and this time there really was a hidden pig, although of course the audience had not found anything under the clown’s cloak at the previous performance. The man then pulled the ear of the real pig that was hidden in his clothes, producing an authentic squeal of pain. The audience shouted that the clown had given a far more realistic performance and they were prepared to drive the country bumpkin off the stage. But he then pulled the actual pig from inside his cloak and showed it to the audience, denouncing their gross error with incontrovertible evidence. ‘Here you go!’ he said. ‘This little pig proves what kind of judges you are!’

NOTE: This story is best known as ‘Parmeno’s pig’ (e.g. Plutarch, *Symposiastic Questions* 5.1).

Fable 593 (Phaedrus 2.5 = Perry 489)

Tiberius Caesar and His Attendant

There is a whole population of busybodies at Rome running all over the place excitedly, occupied without any true occupation, huffing and puffing at frivolous pursuits, and making much out of nothing. They are an annoyance to each other and utterly despised by everyone else. Yet I would like to try to correct this crowd, if possible, by means of a true story: it is one worth listening to.

Tiberius Caesar was on his way to Naples, and had arrived at his estate in Misenum which had been built by Lucullus on a high hill overlooking the Sicilian sea on one side and the Tuscan sea on the other. When Caesar was walking about in the cheerful greenery, one of his household stewards turned up, dressed in a fancy-fringed tunic of Egyptian cotton hanging down from his shoulders. The man began to sprinkle the sizzling hot ground with water from a wooden basin, making a great show of his diligence as Caesar’s attendant, but everyone just laughed at him. The man then ran ahead to the next walkway, using some shortcuts known only to himself, and he started settling the dust in that spot as well. When Caesar recognized the man and realized what he was doing, he said, ‘Hey you!’ The man scampered up to Caesar, excited at the joyful prospect of what seemed a sure reward. Then Caesar’s majestic

person made the following joke: ‘You have not accomplished much and your efforts have come to naught; if you want me to give you the slap that makes you a freedman, it will cost you much more than that!’

NOTE: Lucullus was a prominent Roman of the first century BCE, notorious for his luxurious way of life. Tiberius Caesar, successor to Augustus, reigned from 14 CE until his death in 37 CE. The *alapa* was a ritual slap which formed part of the legal procedure for a slave’s manumission in Rome.

Fable 594 (Phaedrus 3.10 = Perry 501)

Augustus and the Murder

It is dangerous to believe a story, and dangerous not to believe it. I will quickly offer an example of each: Hippolytus died because the people believed his stepmother, but when the people did not believe Cassandra, it spelled the end of Troy. For this reason, the truth must be carefully considered before an incorrect opinion results in a foolish judgement. So that you won’t be tempted to make light of antiquity and its mythical tales, I will also tell you a story which happened in my own lifetime.

There was a certain married man who loved his wife very much and whose son was almost old enough to assume the white toga of manhood. However, one of the man’s freedmen was hoping to be appointed as the man’s immediate heir, so he called the man aside and lied at great length about the man’s son and even more about

the bad behaviour of his faithful wife. Finally, he added something that he realized would cause the greatest possible pain to a loving husband: the man's wife was being visited, said the freedman, by an adulterer, thus defiling the reputation of the house with acts of moral turpitude. The man was outraged at the thought of his wife's supposed crimes, so he pretended to make a trip to the countryside, while secretly hiding in town. Then all of a sudden he came home in the night and headed straight for his wife's bedroom. His wife, meanwhile, had ordered their son to sleep in her bed so that she could keep a close eye on him now that he had grown older. While the servants ran here and there looking for a light, the man was no longer able to hold back his explosive outburst of anger. He approached the bed and felt a head there in the dark. When he detected a man's haircut, he plunged his sword through the man's chest, thinking of nothing but avenging his grief. When the lantern was brought, he saw both his son and his noble wife sleeping there next to him. Deep in sleep, his wife was not even aware of what had happened. The man then punished himself in full for the crime he had committed by falling upon the sword he had drawn in his own readiness to believe the worst. Informers pressed charges against the woman and she was taken away to Rome to be tried in court. Although guilty of no crime, she was subjected to jealous suspicions over the way she had come into possession of the family's property. Her advocates stood by her, stoutly defending the claims of this innocent woman. The judges then asked the divine Augustus to help them faithfully carry out their sworn duty, since the complexity of

the crime had them baffled. Augustus first dispelled the darkness of the unfair charges laid against the woman and then revealed the true explanation of what had happened, as he pronounced the following sentence: ‘Let the freedman who was the cause of this wickedness be punished! Meanwhile, I decree that the woman who has both lost her son and been deprived of her husband should receive our pity rather than our condemnation. If the father had fully investigated the alleged crimes and carefully sifted through the lies, he would not have brought utter ruin upon his house with this appalling crime.’

You cannot ignore everything you hear, but you should not believe it immediately, since those whom you least suspect can turn out to be scoundrels while entirely innocent people can fall victim to treachery. This example may also serve as a warning to simple-minded people not to draw conclusions from hearsay. Human ambition is multifarious, sometimes taking the form you expect, and sometimes not; the man you know personally is the man you really know. (I have explored this matter at greater length because in other cases some people have been annoyed by my excessive brevity.)

NOTE: Hippolytus was falsely accused of rape by his stepmother Phaedra, and Theseus pronounced a fatal curse on his son. Cassandra, the daughter of King Priam of Troy, had received the gift of prophecy but at a terrible cost: although she spoke the truth, no one believed her.

PUNS AND WORD-PLAY

Fable 595 (Phaedrus 3.11 = Perry 502)

The Eunuch and His Accuser

A eunuch was involved in a legal dispute with an extremely unpleasant person who made rude and cutting remarks, and even insulted the eunuch for the loss he had suffered in his bodily parts. The eunuch responded: 'I admit that this is the one thing that puts me in considerable difficulty: I don't have testimony, so to speak, in support of my good character. But you are a fool to denounce me for something that is merely a matter of fate!'

The only thing that can really bring shame on a man is a punishment that he has justly deserved.

NOTE: The Latin depends on a very explicit pun between *testes* meaning 'witnesses' (the same root as in the English word 'testify') and *testes* meaning testicles.

Fable 596 (Chambry 192 = Perry 333)

The Hare and the Fox

The hare said to the fox, 'They say you are very artful, fox. What art is it that you practise exactly?' The fox replied, 'If you don't know my arts, I will have you to dinner so that you can get a taste of my art.' The hare followed the fox to her den but the fox had nothing there to eat except for the hare himself. The hare exclaimed, 'I have

learned to my cost that your name does not derive from any kind of artistry but from fraud!'

The fable shows that overly curious people often pay a very high price for recklessly indulging their curiosity.

NOTE: The Greek fable relies on word-play involving a nickname for the fox, *kerdo*, which is related to trickery and profit-making.

Fable 597 (Romulus 4.20 = Perry 579)

The Man and the Sword

A wicked man comes to ruin himself while bringing ruin to many others as well; listen to the following fable, for example.

A traveller was walking along and found a sword lying in the road. He said to the sword, 'Who lost you?' The weapon replied, 'One man has lost me, but I have caused the loss of many a man!'

This fable tells us that a bad man can come to ruin, but he is able to harm many other people first.

Fable 598 (Syntipas 33 = Perry 254)

The Butcher and the Dog

A dog went into a butcher's shop and stole the heart of some animal. The butcher turned around and said to him, 'You haven't stolen my heart; indeed, I have taken heart from this lesson! So if you ever come back in here again, I will give you the reward you deserve for this act of robbery!'

This fable shows that someone can be induced by experience to learn his lesson and be on his guard.

NOTE: In Greek, the 'heart' was considered a seat of intelligence (something like our 'brains'), whereas we commonly associate the heart with feelings and emotions. Instead of losing heart (= losing his wits), the butcher has taken heart (= wised up).

Fable 599 (Avianus 30 = Perry 583)

The Farmer and the Pig

When a pig kept destroying a farmer's crops and trampling his fertile fields, the farmer cut off the pig's ear. He then let the pig go, expecting that the pig would remember what had happened to him, since he carried with him a reminder of the need to treat the farmer's crops with due respect in the future. Nevertheless, the pig was caught once again in the act of digging ruts in the ground and the treacherous animal was thus deprived of his other ear, the only one that he had left. But as soon as he was let loose again, the pig plunged his deformed head into the aforementioned crops. His multiple offences had made him a marked pig, so the farmer caught him and consigned him to his master's sumptuous table. The farmer sliced and served the various parts of the pig at dinner but when there was no more left, the master asked what had happened to the pig's brains. The fact was that the greedy cook had stolen them, so the farmer calmed his master's understandable outrage by saying that the foolish pig didn't have any brains to begin with. 'Why else

would that pig have kept risking life and limb,' said the farmer, 'and let himself be caught over and over again by the same opponent?'

This illustrative story is a warning for people who take too many risks and who can never keep their hands out of mischief.

NOTE: In the Greek, the cook actually steals the pig's heart, not his brains (see the note to the preceding fable).

Fable 600 (Babrius 95 = Perry 336)

The Lion, the Fox, and the Deer

There was a lion who had fallen ill and was lying in a stony ravine, his sluggish limbs stretched out upon the ground. A friendly fox kept him company, and one day the lion said to her, 'I suppose you want me to survive, so listen: I've got a craving for the deer who lives in that dense thicket of pines there in the wilds of the forest. At the moment I no longer have the strength to go hunting after deer myself, but if you would agree to lay a trap with that honeyed speech of yours, the deer could be within my grasp.' The sly fox went off and found the deer in the wild woodlands, gambolling in a meadow of tender grass. The fox prostrated herself before the deer and greeted her, saying that she had come to relay some auspicious information. 'As you know,' the fox said, 'the lion is my neighbour, but he is very sick and about to die, so he has been thinking about who will be king of the beasts after he is gone. The boar is an idiot, the bear is lazy, the leopard is impulsive, the tiger is a loner who

keeps to himself … but he thinks that the deer would make a most worthy ruler, since she has an impressive appearance and lives a long time. And the antlers of the deer can scare away all kinds of snakes, why, the antlers of the deer are like trees, not at all like the horns of a bull! Need I say more? You have been duly elected: you will rule over the beasts of the hills. When that finally happens, O Mistress, remember that it was the fox who was the first to inform you. That is why I came here, and now goodbye, my dear. I need to hurry back to the lion so that he won't be looking for me again; he relies on my advice in absolutely everything. And I think it would be good if you also obeyed that venerable old head. You need to come to his bedside and comfort him in his trouble. Even little things can sway the thoughts of those who are in the last hours of life; the souls of the dying can be seen in their eyes.' This is what the sly fox said to the deer, and the deer's heart swelled at the sound of those deceitful words. She came to the hollow cave of the beast, with no idea of what lay in store for her. The lion recklessly sprang up from his bed and launched a hasty attack, but he only managed to slash the deer's ears with his pointed claws as the wretched creature ran straight out of the door and disappeared into the depths of the woods. The fox wrung her hands in frustration, since her efforts had proved utterly futile. As for the lion, he groaned and chewed at thin air, equally beset by both hunger and despair. Once again he summoned the fox and asked her to find yet another trick to use to catch the deer. The fox plumbed the very depths of her cunning and then said, 'This is a difficult task indeed. But

nevertheless I will carry out your command!' The fox then set off after the deer, keen as a hound on the trail, devising elaborate traps and all kinds of mischief. Whenever she ran into a shepherd, the fox would ask if he had happened to see a bleeding deer on the run. And when the shepherd had indeed caught a glimpse of the deer, he would point the fox in the right direction. She finally found the deer concealed in the shade, where she had stopped to catch her breath. The fox stood and stared at the deer, eyebrows raised, the very incarnation of shamelessness. A shiver ran down the deer's spine and her legs quivered as she angrily said to the fox, 'Oh you abominable creature! If you dare to come near me or utter so much as a single word, you will live to regret it! Go find some other simpletons that you can outfox; pick someone else to be king and put him on the throne!' But the fox was undaunted and said to the deer, 'Can you really be so mean-spirited? So overcome by fear? So suspicious of your friends? The lion only wanted what was good for you! In an attempt to rouse you from your former idleness, he tugged at your ear, as a father might do on his deathbed. He wanted to bestow on you every precept you would need in order to take charge of such a kingdom, but you could not even withstand the touch of his feeble hand! Instead, you violently turned aside, inflicting a serious wound on yourself. As for the lion, at this moment he is even more upset than you are. Now that he has found you to be so untrustworthy and scatter-brained, he says that the wolf will be appointed king. Alas alack, what a wicked master he will be! What shall I do then? You are the one who has brought

these evils upon all of us. But come, you must be more brave in the future and not let yourself be as easily frightened as some sheep from the flock. I swear these things to you by all the leaves on the trees and by every spring of water: I want to serve you and only you! There is nothing hostile about the lion's behaviour; his heartfelt wish is to make you queen of all the animals!' With these coaxing words, the fox persuaded the tawny deer to enter once again into that very abode of death. As soon as the lion had the deer trapped in the depths of his den, he enjoyed a full-course meal, greedily devouring the flesh of the deer, drinking the marrow from her bones, and feasting on her entrails. The fox, meanwhile, stood there waiting; after having delivered the deer, she was craving a share in the spoils. She stealthily grabbed the brains of the deer which had fallen to the ground and gobbled them up: this, then, was the booty which that sly-boots got for her work. The lion, meanwhile, had made an inventory of all the deer's parts, and the brains were nowhere to be found. He searched around his couch and all over the house. Then the fox confounded the truth of the matter and said, 'That deer had no brains, so don't waste your time looking for them. What kind of brains do you expect from a creature who would come not once but twice into the den of a lion?'

NOTE: Babrius has taken a traditional Aesopic joke about the heart as a seat of intelligence (see the preceding two fables for similar examples) and expanded the story at unprecedented length, anticipating in many ways the later medieval beast epic. The

belief about the power of the deer's antlers to drive away snakes, as well as her long life, were popular legends in Greece and Rome, although these details are extraneous to the actual plot of this story. A story with the same plot but different characters—lion, jackal, and donkey—comprises Book 4 of the *Panchatantra*.

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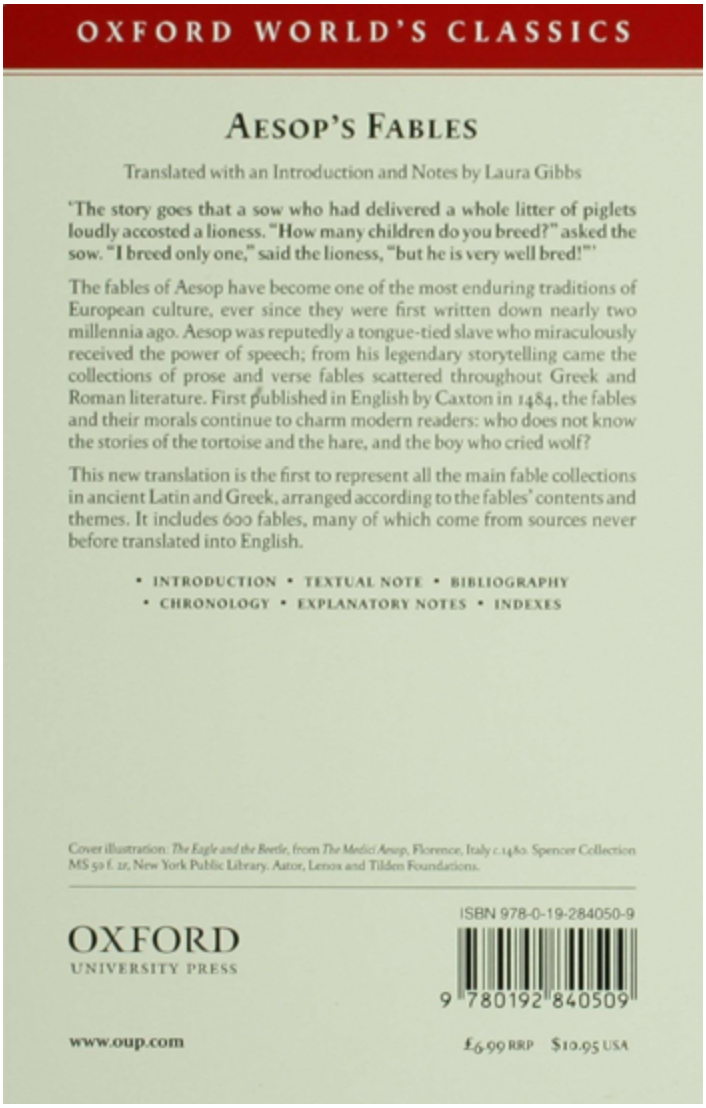
OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS
AESOP'S FABLES
Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Laura Gibbs
'The story goes that a sow who had delivered a whole litter of piglets loudly accosted a lioness. "How many children do you breed?" asked the sow. "I breed only one," said the lioness, "but he is very well bred!"'
The fables of Aesop have become one of the most enduring traditions of European culture, ever since they were first written down nearly two millennia ago. Aesop was reputedly a tongue-tied slave who miraculously received the power of speech; from his legendary storytelling came the collections of prose and verse fables scattered throughout Greek and Roman literature. First published in English by Caxton in 1484, the fables and their morals continue to charm modern readers: who does not know the stories of the tortoise and the hare, and the boy who cried wolf?
This new translation is the first to represent all the main fable collections in ancient Latin and Greek, arranged according to the fables' contents and themes. It includes 600 fables, many of which come from sources never before translated into English.
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• CHRONOLOGY • EXPLANATORY NOTES • INDEXES
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